

I'm not in love by **lovelysarcastic**

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Friends With Benefits, Happy Ending, Present time, alternative universe, fluff with a bit of angst

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-09-03

Updated: 2017-12-02

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:07:58

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 13

Words: 72,416

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Mike Wheeler and Jane 'Eleven' Ives were best friends; best friends who occasionally slept with each other.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Yes, I'm back. At least, for this short story, I am. I'm sorry I put 11:11 on hiatus, but life got complicated and I didn't feel like writing, especially angsty stories.

WARNING: This isn't rated M, but that might change in the future.

I want to thank two dear friends of mine: Jenna, who is an amazing person and a very supportive friend, and Graci (kittenCorrosion) whose latest story was an actual inspiration for me to start writing again.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I want to apologize. English isn't my native language.

May, 24th. Wednesday. 7:33

“Don’t you have class or something?” Eleven asked.

Next to her, laying on his stomach, arms stretched under the pillow, Mike Wheeler opened one eye and stared at her as if she had just asked him the most inappropriate question ever.

“How dare you throw my responsibilities at me when I’m sleeping?” He complained.

“You’re not sleeping,” Eleven remarked with a half-smirk. She rolled to her side and rested a hand on his naked back, stroking it with the tip of her fingers. Mike let out a happy hum and closed his eye again. “But, seriously, you told me last night you had an early class today.”

“Yeah, *I did, El*, and yet you decided to stay and fuck up my sleeping schedule,” he replied, his voice muffled against the pillow. She giggled. “You know I can’t go to classes running on only four hours of

sleep. I have a reputation to keep.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said in a teasing voice. “I didn’t mean to offend the genius boy who got into college with a full scholarship and has a perfect score of all A’s.”

Mike half-snorted at that, his mind already going back into the depths of slumber.

However, Eleven wasn’t tired. Yes, they had only fallen asleep a few hours ago, but she had woken up with a text from her best friend, asking her where she had spent the night (as if that hadn’t been obvious), and now she couldn’t go back to sleep. So, as any reasonable person would do, instead of letting Mike sleep, she moved closer to his body and dropped a leg over his waist. Her lips found his already bruised neck from last night and she started to kiss her way from there to his face.

Mike hummed.

“El, come on,” he muttered. “I need to sleep. I have classes in the afternoon that I don’t want to miss as well.”

Kissing his nose, she pulled back and laid her head on the pillow again. She stared at him for a few seconds, taking in all his pretty freckles (that had been the first thing she noticed about him when they first met), his messy, dark hair, his sharp nose and fleshy, red lips. Her eyes then moved to his neck and his back. He had hickeys and scratches, red deep lines drawn by Eleven’s fingers, from last night activities. She smirked, proud of herself, and touched one of the lines, caressing it with gentleness.

“El,” Mike called out in his sleepy voice.

She sighed.

“You’re a terrible sex buddy sometimes.”

Mike opened one of his eyes again, this time to show how offended he was with her words. She smiled and took the opportunity to lean closer and kiss him on the lips.

"You're terrible," he muttered against her lips and, at last, he decided to move, dropping one arm around her as his body changed positions so he was laying on his side. He pulled Eleven closer, his hand finding a nice spot to rest on her thigh. "You're insatiable, aren't you?"

Eleven's answer was to grab his messy, thick dark hair and pulled him to a passionate kiss.

They had met when they were fifteen, after Eleven's abrupt moving to Hawkins with her mother, Terry Ives, who had suddenly got transferred to the city's hospital as a nurse. The first week of school had been hell until she got to be partners in English class with a scrawny, tall boy called Mike Wheeler. When he had asked her name and she had given him her old nickname, Eleven, he had not laughed at her or found it ridiculous. He had actually said, *cool, do you mind if I call you El?* From that point on, they became close friends; they and Mike's best friend from childhood, Dustin.

They spent their teenage years going on adventures, especially in the summer since that was when they had more time to escape the small town of Hawkins, and, during school year, you most likely would find them at some random party in someone's house almost every Saturday. And, by the age of seventeen, Mike Wheeler and Jane 'Eleven' Ives' drunk make-out sessions were pretty known among students in Hawkins. Well, at least among those who liked to attend parties. They first started kissing each other after Mike's first girlfriend, Jennifer Hayes, broke up with him in order to be with a guy named Carlton from the football team. At that point, Eleven, who had been on-and-off with a boy from the theatre group, decided to call it off for good since the boy couldn't make up his mind (he never once asked her out, he just assumed they were together, and Eleven didn't like to assume things, she liked facts).

People would ask them a lot of times if they were dating. Hell, even their parents did at some point. Their answers were always a big no, partnered up with a can-you-believe-this-dude snort. No, Mike and Eleven were friends, really good friends, who occasionally hooked up with each other. It was easier like that because they had the facts on their side: they were friends, they cared about each other and no romantic feelings meant no pain. It was all good.

When the time came to apply for colleges, at the age of eighteen, they both agreed to keep being friends no matter what. No distance would ever put an end to their good friendship. But, funny enough, destiny, God or whatever you wanted to call it, was on their side and they got accepted into colleges in the same city, Mike going off to study Creative Writing with a minor in History and Eleven taking up a Speech Therapy course. It was easier and more fun to enter a new phase of your life when not only one, but two (Dustin was there with them as well, studying Biology) of your closest friends were right there by your side.

While Mike and Dustin decided to rent a place between the two of them, Eleven was sent off to live in the dorms, since it was cheaper, and ended up sharing a room with a redheaded girl called Max Winters, who, nowadays, was her best friend and one of the best people she had ever met. For a while there, Max and Dustin had a thing going on too, a bit like Mike and Eleven, but they had recently broken it off as they were actually looking for something more serious and knew that together they wouldn't get it.

Eleven's phone suddenly buzzed from its place on Mike's night table.

"N-no," Mike begged, trying to keep kissing her, but Eleven moved quickly, rolling over him to grab the phone. He sighed, defeated. "Why do you do this to me?"

"WHY DO YOU GUYS DO THIS TO ME?" Dustin's annoyed voice asked from the other side of the wall.

"Sorry, Dustin!" They said together.

Mike looked over at Eleven, who was grinning while replying to the text she had got.

"Is it Max?" He asked.

Eleven blinked and looked back at him. She bit her bottom lip, nervous, before saying, "No, it's actually my date for tomorrow night."

Mike looked surprised.

“You have a date tomorrow night?”

“Yeah. Remember that guy I made out with in Troy Harrington’s party?”

“Wasn’t that guy me?” Mike asked.

Eleven rolled her eyes. Putting down her phone again, she turned over to Mike, looking for a nice embrace, and he quickly helped her get into a more comfortable position, grabbing her by the hips and pulling her almost on top of him. She laid her chin on his chest.

“The first guy I made out with at the party.”

Mike pretended to be hurt. She rolled her eyes.

“He was nice. I gave him my number, and we’ve been texting for a while now. He finally got the balls to ask me on a date. We’re going to eat pizza tomorrow night.”

Mike snorted.

“Okay, that sounds fun. I hope you don’t get herpes.”

Eleven hit him on his chest and he groaned in pain.

“Dude, I was joking!”

“Anyways,” Eleven emphasized the word, flipping her tousled, curly hair behind her shoulder, “I’m just going to, you know, ‘test the waters’.”

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that I’m just going to see if he is a good, nice guy. I mean, I know he’s a good kisser because I’ve kissed him, but, who knows, maybe... maybe he’s the one for me, Mike,” Eleven said, nodding her head in a very solemn way.

They stared at each other for a few seconds before Mike burst out

laughing and, soon enough, Eleven joined him.

“GUYS, SERIOUSLY, EITHER GO OUT OR SLEEP,” Dustin’s more awakened and angry voice echoed from the other room.

“SORRY!” They yelled back.

Dustin still muttered something that they didn’t quite catch. Eleven’s phone buzzed again and this time, when she tried to go and grab it, Mike went after it faster and took it.

“Michael!” She complained and fought to reach for the phone.

But Mike stood up, only his underwear, and moved to the other side of the room. He read the message she had got and then gave her a kind of dramatic sexy look in which he moved his eyebrows up and down.

“He is really *excited* for tomorrow night, El. Don’t forget to pack condoms with you.”

“Lol, Michael,” Eleven replied. The actual use of the online slang for laughing in her speech made Mike snort. “I’m not going to sleep with him.”

“Why not? You sleep with me.”

Eleven rolled her eyes and pulled the sheets away from her body. she stood up and marched up to Mike, taking her phone from his hands. He smirked down at her.

“Well, you’re my sex buddy. That’s your job.”

“Well, if he is going to be your boyfriend, then it will be his job too.”

His words were meant as a joke, something to tease Eleven about, since that was their thing, they joked and teased each other with no second intentions or harm feelings. Yet, the reality of the situation actually hit them deeply, both realizing for a second that, yeah, if Eleven got a boyfriend, this little thing they had going on for three years now would be over.

There was an awkward moment between the two of them, in which both processed what had just been said. Then, Eleven hit Mike's arm and retorted, "As if I would ever get a boyfriend, Mike Wheeler," before leaving the room in only his t-shirt.

May, 25th. Thursday. 19h41.

"Are you going to Mike and Dustin's tonight?" Max asked, sounding confused.

Eleven, who was dressed up in a flowered dress, black tights and a pair of Converse, looked at her best friend through the mirror she had been using as she did her make-up. Max was laying on her single bed, a book in her hands and her red hair in a messy ponytail.

"No. Should I?"

"You're dressed like you're going to have sex."

"No, I'm not."

Max pulled herself up with her elbow, letting her Chemistry book fall to the bed, and gave Eleven a stern gaze.

"You dress like that whenever you got meet Mike. Well, when you feel like dressing up. I've actually seen you leave the dorms looking like a homeless person to go bang him."

"The clothes are going off when I get there, so what's the point?" Eleven replied, applying with a steady hand red lipstick on her lips. "And no, I'm not going to meet Mike. I'm meeting Sean. I told you this. The guy from Troy's party?"

"Oh, that dude? I thought he didn't mean anything to you."

"I gave him my number. I told you that."

Max sat up on her bed. "Yeah, but you also went home and fucked Mike, so I thought he was just a random boy who got lucky to have you for five minutes before Wheeler showed up."

Mike had indeed showed up late for Troy Harrington's party, having had an essay to deliver until midnight that day. When Max had found Eleven sitting on Sean's lap, she had sent the boy a sorry look that her friend had missed and had announced "Mike's here." Eleven flew from Sean's lap and went to look for her friend. One hour later, they were hooking up in one of the bedrooms.

"But it's always like that," Eleven finally said. "I'm always going to hook up with Mike. At least, as long as we're both single."

Max's mouth moved almost as if the girl was going to reply to her friend, yet she decided to remain quiet, muttering a whatever before laying back down on the bed and picking up her Chemistry book.

Eleven was putting on her leather jacket, one that once belonged to a thirteen-year-old Mike, when she got a text from Sean saying he was waiting for her outside.

"Bye, Max."

"Bye, El. See you tomorrow."

Eleven opened the room's door before turning to Max and saying, "I'm coming back tonight, Max."

"No, you're not."

Eleven rolled her eyes before shutting the dorms' door behind her.

Midway through dinner, which was going fine, really fine, since Sean was actually a funny and sweet guy, Eleven got a text from Mike. Her phone, which had been resting next to her plate, lightened up as his message came in. She picked it up, interrupting Sean's story about a drunk incident he had had a few months ago, and read it.

Wheeler my boy

Dude, I'm going on a date with Tina Muller. Dude, Tina Muller. El, I'm going to hook up with Tina. Oh my God. El.

Eleven stared at the message without knowing how to react. Tina Muller was Mike's crush since freshman year. She was this older girl in his Creative Writing course with whom he had partnered up in outside-class projects. She was tall, almost tall as he was, and had these big, fleshy lips that Dustin liked to describe as "blow-job lips", and she was just... the perfect girl for Mike. Eleven liked to tease him a lot about her, whenever they saw her on campus or met her randomly in a public place. The girl always greeted Mike with a nice smile and, after she left, Mike would touch his chest and sigh, "One day".

How did that happen?

Only after she sent a reply, Eleven noticed that it might sound a bit harsh, so she added a quick 'congrats bud' afterwards.

"Jane?"

"Eleven," Eleven corrected, putting down her phone. She had told Sean a few times now that she would rather be called Eleven than Jane.

"Oh, sorry. It's just... You said your name was Jane when we first met."

"Yeah, I was so drunk. I can't believe I said Jane. I've been Eleven since I was a little kid, really," she confessed, grabbing a piece of her pizza and taking a bite.

"Why Eleven?" Sean asked with curiosity.

She shrugged.

"I don't even remember. It had something to do with a game that I really liked and, one day, I just started asking people to call me Eleven. My mom just went along because why not? It could be worse, right?"

Sean chuckled.

“Yeah, I mean... you could have asked to be called Sixty-Nine.”

Eleven stared at him, a hesitant laugh in her throat trying to decide if it should come up or not. In the end, she chuckled.

“That would have gone terribly wrong.”

Sean paid the bill despite Eleven wanting to pay for her half. After getting out of the restaurant, Eleven was halfway through complaining about it when Sean interrupted her with a kiss.

“You can pay for the next, yes?” He said after pulling back.

Eleven stared at him. Sean was nice. He was cute too, and not too tall (like Mike who was a giraffe next to her), and he actually seemed to be a reasonable guy.

“Sure. Next time,” she promised.

When they got to the car, Eleven finally took a look at her phone to read Mike’s reply. She found three unread messages.

Wheeler my boy

So, I met her outside my Linguistics class. We talked for a bit and I ended up asking her if she wanted to meet at Benny’s bar tomorrow. She said yes??? Like, how cool?!

Wheeler my boy

Dude, please answer. I need to freak out with someone and Dustin is already tired of me.

Wheeler my boy

Oh shit, sorry. I forgot you were on your date. How is it going? Packed

condoms for the trip?

“So, do you want to go somewhere else, or home?” Sean asked after starting the engine and pulling the car from its parking slot.

Eleven re-read the messages.

“Can you take me back to the dorms? It’s just... Tomorrow I still have classes.”

“Oh, sure.” Sean chuckled. “I forget that some people have classes on Friday. I never did.”

“Lucky you,” Eleven muttered, her eyes flickering to the car’s window, taking in the quiet streets.

Why did she feel like shit?

She wasn't supposed to feel like shit after having a really great date with a really nice guy.

After Sean dropped her off, she watched him drive away. Then, she looked back at the dorms’ huge white building. Many lights were still on; it was only ten pm, after all. Eleven looked down at the unanswered messages from Mike. She bit her bottom lip, uncertain of what to do.

If she hadn’t got those news, there was no doubt in where she would be going right now. Mike’s place was like a haven to her. She was always there. Why was she hesitating now?

It was ridiculous, really, this sudden feeling of uncertainty that haunted her mind. She had just got back from a date with a nice guy, to whom she had lied about her classes tomorrow, and was now hesitant in either going actually home or going to meet her fuck buddy. No, Eleven didn’t have any classes on Friday morning. She was wiser than that and had picked the afternoon schedule. But, when she had said that to Sean, her intention was to go to Mike’s place. Why wasn’t she going, then? It was just a ten-minute walk.

“What are you doing here?” Max asked from her bed. She had her

laptop next to her and had clearly paused something as soon as she saw Eleven walk into their room.

“I’m back from my date. I told you I would be back.”

“Yeah, but...” Max frowned. “I thought you would go to Mike’s afterwards.”

“He’s got a date.”

“Tonight?”

“No, tomorrow.”

Max raised a confused eyebrow, unable to follow her best friend’s logic.

“Okay... I’m watching Rick and Morty. Do you want to watch it with me?”

“Nah. I’m going to take a shower and go to bed.”

Mike’s messages were never answered.

May, 27th. Saturday. 15h13.

“I don’t get it. You didn’t kiss her?” Eleven asked, confused, as she cleaned with the back of her hand a bit of chocolate ice-cream from her chin. She was dressed in comfy, old clothes, a sweatshirt that belonged to Mike, and a pair of sweatpants. Her hair was up in a messy braid that she had done last night and had not had the strength to take it off.

“Well, no,” Mike replied, digging his spoon into the chocolate ice-cream box that was set between the two of them on the sofa, and then taking it to his mouth. He ate it slowly before adding, “Everything went great, yeah? So, I thought... Let’s take it slow. I don’t know.”

“Maybe you’re just a pussy,” Eleven teased.

“Fuck you, El.”

They chuckled together.

“What about your date? With.... Whatever his name was?”

“Sean,” Eleven reminded him. “And it was good. He was nice. We’re probably going out again. I don’t know. We didn’t decide anything, but he didn’t let me pay the bill –“At this information, Mike gasped dramatically –“I know! He convinced me that I’d pay next time, so...”

“So, there’s gotta be a next time because Eleven Ives has to pay for the bill.”

Eleven pointed her spoon at Mike. “You gotta it, bud.”

As background-sound, Mike’s phone, which was being used as a stereo connected to a small, roundish speaker, switched songs to a soft, kind of melody. Eleven recognized it straightaway and her eyes opened wide in excitement. Mike chuckled.

She started singing along the singer, *“I’m not in love, so don’t forget it, it’s just a silly phase I’m going through...”*

Mike laughed at her before joining in.

It was special song for them (not that they would ever admit it out loud, though) because, two years ago, when Eleven and Mike had decided to start sleeping together, to have their first time with each other, Mike had tried to make it a bit romantic, which, at first, made Eleven laugh a lot, but, in the end, she understood. It was a special occasion. So, Mike had put on one of his mixed CDs playing, one that, until this day, Eleven was sure he had composed for that night in particular. This song had been on it. She had kept the CD after that night, stealing it from Mike without him knowing. Of course, he had found out soon enough, but let her keep it anyway.

“Ooh, you’ll wait a long time for meeee,” Eleven sang, leaning close to Mike’s face for the dramatics of the scene.

He sang the verse back to her, his body following her movement, and soon they were kissing each other. Their mouths tasted like

chocolate, and their hands, which were now on each other's faces, were sticky with dried ice-cream.

They pulled back when the song changed to *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. Mike smirked, licked his thumb and then cleaned Eleven's chin with it.

"You're a mess, El."

"Shut up, Wheeler. Where's Dustin?"

"Out with his new girlfriend." Eleven raised an eyebrow, curious. "Well, I say it's his girlfriend, he says it's not, but whatever."

"That sounds fun."

"Yeah. How's Max doing?" He asked back.

"She's seeing a guy too. His name is Lucas. He's cool. You've probably seen him at some parties. That's where they met, actually."

"That's where most people meet, El," Mike replied teasingly. "I mean, didn't you meet the *love of your life* in one of those?"

Eleven sent him a deadly look which had him laughing really loud, head thrown back. In his moment of distraction, Eleven threw herself at him, accidentally tossing the ice-cream box on the floor. She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him passionately, her lips moving against his almost in an angry way. Mike dropped his spoon on the floor and grabbed her by her waist, moving her so she was sitting more comfortably on his lap, one leg on each side of his body.

Mike's right hand sneaked inside Eleven's sweatshirt and moved up in a gentle caress before making its way to her ribs, his fingers lingering on her bra's shape. Eleven pulled back for a second, taking a deep breath, before kissing him again, her hands messing with his thick hair.

It was hunger that always drove them to be with each other. Hunger and trust. Whatever happened between them, whatever they said, or felt, in moments of heat, it was always going to remain between them.

Eleven felt Mike's other hand moved from her back to her sweatpants' front. He played with its strings for a bit, untangling them before moving his hand under them. Eleven gasped, her legs opening wider.

Mike's fingers were almost inside her underwear when suddenly the flat's door opened and Dustin entered. He took one look at them before shouting, "For fuck's sakes! Keep that shit in the bedroom!"

Eleven jumped away from Mike's lap, going back to her seat. Mike took a quick look at his friend before leaning down to pick up the ice-cream box, which had stained the floor a bit, and his dirty spoon.

"How are you doing, Dustin?" Eleven asked, trying to tame her hair for the first time in the day.

Dustin glared at her. She pretended to shiver in fear.

"Fuck off, I'm not in the mood for this shit," he muttered and started walking out of the living-room.

"What, you had a fight with your girlfriend?" Mike joked.

Dustin turned around and pointed his finger at Mike.

"I've told you a million times: Ceci is NOT my girlfriend." And then he left.

"Someone is in a bad *moood*," El whispered in a singing tone.

As Mike snickered at her remark, he stood and took the ice-cream box and his spoon to the kitchen. Eleven, founding her spoon under a cushion, followed him.

"What do you think is wrong with Dustin?" She asked after putting down the spoon in the sink, where Mike had dropped his.

"I don't know. I'll talk to him later."

After putting the ice-cream inside the refrigerator, Mike slipped one hand inside his sweatpants' pocket and took out his phone. He checked something in it and smirked.

“What is it?” Eleven asked and tried to peek.

“Tina just sent me a message. She asked if I want to go to the movies with her tomorrow,” Mike told her with a happy smile. “I’m going to say yes. I don’t think I have any plans.”

Eleven wanted to open her mouth and say *but tomorrow is Sunday. Sunday is our lazy day*. She remained quiet, of course, trying to be happy for her best friend, who was finally going on dates with his crush of two years.

“Maybe I’ll kiss her tomorrow,” Mike remarked cheekily.

Eleven tried to smile at him, tried to be supportive.

No matter what anyone could possibly insinuate, Eleven texting Sean when she got back to her dorms, asking him out for dinner on Monday, did not - really, *did not* - have anything to do with the fact that Mike had made new plans with Tina.

Really. It didn’t.

June, 1st. Thursday. 22:45.

“Honestly, I would marry Cersei,” Mike said. On the TV, there was an episode of season six of Game of Thrones on.

“What? She fucks her brother,” Eleven replied disgusted.

“And you fuck your best friend,” Mike replied slyly.

Eleven stared at him. “You can’t even compare the two scenarios.”

Mike shrugged and buried his body deeper into the couch, grabbing a cushion and putting it over his lap, holding it there tightly.

“Fine. Can I continue with the game?”

“Yes.”

There was a moment of quiet in which both stared at the scene going

on, something to do with Arya and the Faceless Men.

“I think I would kill Arya.”

“Arya is awesome, Mike,” Eleven replied.

“Yeah, but she’s fucking scary. She could kill you in a heartbeat, so yeah, I’d rather kill her than end up being killed,” Mike argued. “And I’d kiss Daenerys.”

“You know you can choose from anyone in all the cast of Game of Thrones, right?” Eleven reminded him.

“Really?” Mike sounded really surprised. “Then, I’d kiss Robb Stark. I’m pretty sure I’m gay for him.”

Eleven laughed.

Feeling tired of her sitting position, she decided to lay down on the sofa and put her head on the cushion that was on Mike’s lap. Automatically, his hands found somewhere to touch her, his right one playing with her hair and his left resting over her chest, his fingers almost tickling her neck.

“And you?” He asked. “Which one would you marry, kill or kiss?”

Eleven took her time to think.

“I’d marry Daenerys. She has three fuckin’ dragons,” she answered and Mike snorted. He already knew she would pick that character to marry. “I’d kiss Robb because he was really, really cute. And I’d kill... the Night King.”

Mike groaned.

“Oh man. Why didn’t I think of that one?”

Eleven smirked, tilting her head up to look at Mike.

“I’m a genius, you’re not.”

Mike rolled his eyes and then moved up to sit straight, making

Eleven's head fall lower on his lap.

"I'm a genius, you're not," he mimicked in a teasing tone as he leaned down and kissed her.

Eleven raised a hand to his hair, taking it into a tight grip. She loved grabbing Mike's hair. He had one of the softest hairs she had ever touched (it was softer than hers), and, if she were completely honest, to be the only one in the world knowing how much it triggered him to have his hair pulled during heated moments like this made her feel really fucking good.

Mike pulled back, his lips still dangerously close to hers. He licked them, the tip of his tongue touching her lips in the process.

"Dustin will be home anytime soon," he said.

Eleven nodded.

"Bedroom?"

Mike agreed.

"Bedroom."

Dustin didn't really care that two of his closest friends were idiots who liked to have sex with each other instead of going out and meeting actual people who they could properly date. But it really pissed him off coming home after a long day and having to find the two of them in compromising positions. Of course, he only became pissed off by that after coming home and finding Mike and Eleven hooking up *more than once* on top of the kitchen's table, on the sofa and against the hallways corridor. It was too much for his poor heart. *The bedroom is right there, guys, use it.*

Eleven took of her sweatshirt as soon as Mike closed the bedroom's door. Then, she helped him take of his t-shirt and pulled him into a heated kiss, her tongue meeting his in a fierce battle for dominance, her hands grabbing his hair so hard that it had to hurt, but Mike just groaned in pleasure. They moved to his bed, the sheets already untangled from their first round during the afternoon.

Mike pulled back for a moment to reach into his night table's drawer and grab a condom. Eleven managed to pull her sweatpants and underwear out.

"Jeez, someone's eager," Mike teased right before he was pulled back into a kiss.

It wasn't always rushed. It wasn't always just a feeling of... *we're fucking, that's all we're doing*. No, they had their moments. Whenever they felt like going slow, they did. Whenever they felt like going fast, they did. As long as both were in the same mood, everything was okay. It was easy. Eleven honestly believed that sex with Mike was the easiest and most relaxing thing in the world. They just knew each other; where to touch, how to touch, the softest spots, the spots you could never, in your dreams, dare to touch...

Mike kissed down her neck, made his way between her breasts and down her stomach. Eleven tried to grab him, tried to pull him up again.

"Not now," she asked, finding his lips again. "Later," she added in a whisper.

So, Mike grabbed the condom and tore it apart with the help of his teeth.

By the time, they finally heard the flat's door open and close, announcing Dustin's arrival, there were two used condoms on Mike's bedroom floor and a joint was being passed between the two of them.

"Don't you think it's weird how we despise cigarettes, but this – "Eleven raised the joint – "this is fine?"

Mike chuckled and rolled over to his side, wrapping an arm around her naked waist.

"Weed is cool, tobacco isn't."

"Wow, what a great slogan," Eleven said sarcastically. "You should make a living out of slogans."

Mike's lips curled into a smile, his face burying deep into the pillow.

“Thanks, babe.”

Eleven took another drag before passing it to Mike.

On the other side of the wall, they heard Dustin moving around, preparing himself to go to bed.

“What has he been up to?” Eleven whispered, taking in consideration Dustin’s probable tiredness as it was almost two am in the morning.

“I’ve told you,” Mike said, exhaling a big, greyish cloud of smoke, “He has a girlfriend. He just won’t admit it.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s recent. And he wants to be sure it will work out before introducing her to us. Remember how it first was like when he and Max decided to call it off?” Mike asked as he passed the joint back to her.

“Oh yes. It was a bit awkward.”

Those had been difficult weeks, at the end of last school year, when Max and Dustin weren’t sure on how to behave around each other after having decided they were going to stop the all friends-with-benefits thing they had had going on for a couple of months. They hadn’t been quite good at being on the same page. Was a brush of the arms too much? Was a smile a code for let’s-bang-again? Was remain in clear awkward silence better for all? Eleven and Mike were the ones that filled in the moments of quietness with random topics. Thankfully, after a while, things got better. Now, Dustin and Max could laugh and talk to each other as two good friends. The past was in the past.

“Mike?” Eleven called.

“Yeah?” He said, the joint stuck between his lips.

“Can you promise me that, if we ever stop doing this sex-buddies thing, we’ll never be awkward around each other?” She asked in a weak voice.

That was one of the things that Eleven dreaded the most in some days, when she got to think about what she and Mike were doing. One day, one of them would eventually want to date someday for real. They would call it off, taking the 'with benefits' from the friends. But could they still be friends? Because they were great together, really. They had a friendship that a lot of people envied, and they knew some who had actually told them face to face that yeah, they were a bit jealous of how the two of them were such amazing friends.

Not having Mike as a friend... That was something she could never live with.

A pair of lips touched Eleven's forehead, making her look up. Mike smiled at her.

"I promise."

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

I wanna thank everyone who took their time to read, kudo and comment the first chapter. It really meant a lot to me that you did so.

If there are any grammar mistakes, please don't be afraid to tell me so. English isn't my native language, so writing in it sometimes gets a bit complicated.

I will only be able to post the third chapter next week since things are going to get a bit busy around here for the next days.

June, 8th. Friday. 23:47

Eleven was taking her fifth shot of the night, after having drank two cups of vodka with lemon as well. She had an arm wrapped around Max's neck and the two were giggling obnoxiously loud in the middle of someone's kitchen. Standing by the fridge, they could see Max's boyfriend, Lucas, making small chat with his best friend, a small, sweet boy called Will Byers. Max and Lucas hadn't come together to the party. Their relationship was still a bit fresh and they were trying to keep it cool, as in *let's not throw ourselves into this thing and completely forget about everyone else*. As her best friend, Eleven had indeed already met Lucas and she was actually very fond of the boy. He was sensible and a good catch for Max.

"You're my best friend, El, my love," Max confessed drunk, her nose touching Eleven's.

Eleven giggled.

"You're the light of my life, Max," she replied and titled her head so she could kiss Max on the nose.

Mike was somewhere in the party with Tina. They had come together, which had something that bothered Eleven for a total of

five seconds until she put it behind her because *why couldn't they come together?*, alongside Dustin and his new girlfriend, a girl named Ceci. Of course, when drunk Eleven had asked him if the girl that he was holding hands with was his girlfriend, Dustin had blushed deeply and offered to get her a drink instead of answering.

Somewhere in the party, Sean was enjoying himself. She and he had already met in the line to the bathroom, made out a bit before Eleven's turn to use the toilet came, and since then, they had not seen each other.

"LUCAS," Max shouted to capture her boyfriend's attention. He looked over at her, frowning in confusion. "I want to make out!"

Lucas rolled his eyes, said something to his laughing best friend, and then came to meet Max.

"Hey, Eleven," he greeted as he wrapped an arm around his girlfriend. "And you are drunk."

"Hey, Lucas," Eleven greeted back.

Max laughed, putting an arm around her boyfriend's shoulders.

"So what if I am?"

"I'm going to have to take you home." Lucas replied while shaking his head, pretending to be disappointed. "And you know I can't enter your dorms in the middle of the night."

"Oh, what a dilemma!" Max exclaimed in a weird, dramatic accent. "Oh, hey Will!"

Will had approached them after finding himself alone in the middle of strangers. He glanced up at Lucas.

"I think I'm going to head home."

"Noo, Will," Lucas whined. "How am I going to go home later? You're the designated driver."

Will sighed.

“Dude, I’m tired. I’ve been up since six am.”

“But, man, listen...”

Eleven’s ears, which until then had been drunk focused on their conversation, suddenly captured a song she was very familiar with. Turning around to look for Mike, because Mike was her dancing partner, she left the kitchen and skipped her way to the living-room. She found him in a corner, his head up as he had recognized the song as well. Their eyes met and they smiled at each other.

Quickly, Mike excused himself from Tina and made his way to Eleven, who met him halfway through the crowded living-room. Their hands found each other’s bodies and they started dancing as Enrique Iglesias sang in Spanish.

Of course, Eleven, who had taken five years of Spanish, knew the song by heart while Mike could only sing the chorus. And it had taken him many, many nights of listening to the song on repeat on YouTube to actually learn that part of the lyrics.

Holding on to Eleven’s left hand, Mike raised his arm so she could spin around. She did so, ending up leaning back against Mike’s chest, their other hands finding each other in a tight grasp as they danced to the rhythm of the song.

“Con él te duele el corazón, y conmigo te duelen los pies,” they sang together. Mike’s accent was terrible, making Eleven laugh midway through singing.

At some point, almost at the end of the song, Eleven made a move to kiss Mike, because that was their thing. They got drunk, they got needy, they got comfortable, so they kissed each other. But this time Mike, even though he was drunk (he had already drunk six beers), stopped her, pulling her away from him. Eleven stared at him, frowning.

“I’m here with Tina, El,” Mike reminded her. “It will be rude if I ditch her to kiss you.”

Eleven pouted. This wasn’t okay. She wasn’t used to this kind of

rejection by Mike. Three years of making-out drunk in parties and, for the first time, Mike refused.

Mike chuckled upon seeing her puckering bottom lip, and pulled her into a hug so that he could whisper in her ear, "Maybe later, babe."

Because that was their thing. They always went home together.

It was four am when Eleven decided she was too tired of making out with Sean in one of the kitchen's corners, and left the party.

Still too drunk (who let her keep taking shots all night?), she almost tripped as she crossed the doorway. Cursing, she stepped away from the sneaky door, sending it one last angry glare. She had her phone in her hand and her purse over her shoulder. She stopped still, noticing she had an unread message from Max.

Max light of life

Went home with Lucas. Sorry.

Eleven groaned, titling her head back. How was she going to go home now?

"El."

Eleven turned around, almost tripping again, but got lucky that Dustin grabbed her arms before she fell.

"Dustin!" She exclaimed happily. Behind him, there was a petit girl, with curly blonde hair. "Dustin's girlfriend!"

Dustin groaned.

"Dude, come on. You're still drunk? Where's Mike?"

"Making out with Tina," Eleven replied in a harsh tone. Dustin raised an eyebrow. "What? He is. Last time I saw him, at least."

Dustin sighed.

“You two, honestly. Come on, let’s go home.” He looked over his shoulder at the girl who was his girlfriend, but he didn’t admit she was. “You’re coming, right?”

The girl nodded.

“Can you call for an Uber, please?” Dustin asked her.

The girl nodded again and put a hand inside her leather jacket, grabbing her phone.

“Cool jacket,” Eleven complimented.

The girl smiled.

“Thanks.”

Eleven then leaned her head against Dustin’s chest and groaned.

“I’m so drunk, Dustin.”

“I can see that. It’s five in the morning. How can you still be drunk?”

Eleven only got the strength to shrug.

“Uber will be here in five minutes,” the girl announced, approaching the two of them. She took one worried look at Eleven and asked, “Is she okay?”

“Just drunk and sad.”

“I’m not sad!” Eleven raised her head and hit Dustin on his chest. “Why would I be sad?”

But Dustin didn’t answer her.

The Uber came and took them back to Dustin and Mike’s place. When they got there, Eleven automatically made her way to Mike’s room.

“El, stop it.” Dustin put an arm between her body and the door.

“What?” She asked, confused.

“Look,” Dustin said, motioning with his eyes to the doorknob. It had a tie on it. “It’s a clear sign that he is busy.”

Eleven stared at the tie, knowing exactly what it meant. She wasn’t dumb. She had put that tie a million times before on that doorknob. Mike was having sex. With someone that wasn’t her. For the first time ever.

“Come on, you can sleep on the couch. It’s comfy.”

Eleven only nodded, forbidding herself from showing any weaknesses. It was alright. Like, of course, Mike could come home and have sex with the girl he had been crushing on for the last two years. Who was she to stop him?

No one, of course. She wouldn’t stop Mike for living his life. Like she didn’t stop herself from crying quietly under the blanket that Dustin had got for her before he went to bed.

June, 9th. Saturday. 11:45

Eleven woke up with the sound of Game of Throne’s intro song playing loudly.

Opening her eyes, she saw an episode of the show starting and, sitting on the armchair, on her left, was Mike eating his cereal, looking like shit because he always looked like shit when he was hangover. His hair was so messy it looked worse than a nest of rats, his eyes were ornamented with two, big dark circles under them and his lips were dry.

Eleven groaned as a loud sound yapped from the TV.

“Oh, hey you,” Mike greeted.

“Fuck off,” she muttered and turned around, pulling the blanket over her head so she could prevent the light from bothering her eyes. “And turn that shit down!”

Mike did as she said and remained quiet. She managed to fall asleep again.

Dustin left his room around one pm. He took one look at Mike, who was now halfway into an episode of Bob's burgers, and then at a sleeping Eleven. He approached the sofa and leaned down to peek under the blanket.

"Dude, she was so drunk last night."

Mike just hummed, his eyes never leaving the TV.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Mike muttered.

Dustin raised an eyebrow, suspicious. Mike wasn't a quiet hangover kind of guy, he talked as much as a happy and hydrated Mike did. So, something was clearly wrong.

"Has Tina left?"

Mike nodded.

"Did you two have a good time last night?"

Mike shrugged.

"I saw the tie on the doorknob," Dustin finally confessed.

Mike looked over at him.

"We didn't sleep with each other," he said.

Dustin seemed surprised. Mike rolled his eyes.

"It was just for precaution, you know? The doors don't have keys to lock them., and she had never been here before. Imagine if someone barged in the room out of blue. It wouldn't be nice for her," Mike explained.

"Well, Eleven almost did," Dustin told him.

Mike looked down at the sleeping figure on his sofa. His best friend, who had told him to fuck off one hour ago.

“But she was really drunk. She didn’t see it until I pointed it out,” Dustin added.

Mike nodded so that his friend knew he had listened.

Dustin realized he wasn’t going to get anything more out of his friend. He straightened his back and said, “Anyways, Ceci is getting dressed. I’m taking her out for a late breakfast, okay?”

“Sure. Have fun.”

Dustin took one last look at Mike before going to look for Ceci, somewhere in his bedroom or in the bathroom. A few minutes later, they left the flat.

Turning off the TV, Mike glanced at Eleven, taking in her sleeping figure under the blanket, and sighed. He stood up, grabbing his empty bowl, and went to the kitchen to wash it. Then, he went to take a shower.

Eleven woke up around three pm, very confused and with a terrible headache. This time she heard the echo of a song coming out of the hallway where the bedrooms were. She sat up, looked around, and then rubbed her eyes with the palms of her hands.

Her head was killing her.

Taking a quick trip to the bathroom, Eleven confirmed that the music was coming from Mike’s room. She thought about going in there, asking him for some clothes, but then a flash of a tie hanging on his doorknob came to her mind and she didn’t feel like talking to him anymore.

Gathering her things, Eleven left the flat and took her usual ten-minute walk back to her dorms.

Max wasn’t there yet, probably still at Lucas’.

Priorities, Eleven thought. She took a long shower, applying shampoo

three times to her hair to get rid of the smell of smoking, and then went to a near café to have something to eat. It was only when she sat down, by one of the café's big windows, enjoying the sunlight's warmth, that she checked her phone and saw two unread messages, one from Max and another from Sean.

Max light of life

Coming back after dinner. Lucas taking me to the movies. How was your night?

Sean

Hey. Did you get home safely? Are you doing anything tomorrow?

A waitress came to take her order. Eleven asked for a cup of tea and a cheese sandwich.

She replied to the messages, telling Max that her night was good, that she had gone home with Dustin and his new girlfriend, and answering Sean that yeah, she got home safely and no, she wasn't doing anything tomorrow.

A few minutes later, she got a reply from Sean, asking her if she wanted to meet him for lunch and then spend the afternoon studying for exams. Ignoring the fact that Sundays were her day and Mike's, she agreed to meet with Sean. Mike certainly would be busy with *Tina*, anyways.

She knew it was ridiculous to feel betrayed. They were fuck buddies, friends with benefits, friends who had sex because it was easy and fun doing it together, but they were both aware – or at least they should be – that this thing they had wouldn't last forever. If it did, then it would turn into a fucking relationship, and neither wanted that. After all, they began hooking up after going through break-ups when they were seventeen. The all point of being in this sex buddies' situation was to get away from the commitment.

And, jeez, they were friends. Best friends. That was all they were. It didn't matter that they knew each other in ways that most best friends usually did. At the end of the day, it wasn't the sex that should matter, but the friendship. Eleven still got Mike's friendship, she would never lose that; he had promised that a dozen times in the past years, so why, why did she feel so betrayed?

Honestly, it was so ridiculous. That was the only word her mind could come up with.

You're being so fucking ridiculous, Eleven. What is wrong with Mike dating a girl he likes? Don't you have a boy you like too? Isn't Sean nice?

Yeah, Sean was nice. Yeah, they went on dates once in a while, but she always, always came back to Mike. Three years investing into a friends-with-benefits relationship led to this, Eleven living a limbo between actually going out, falling in love, and staying with Mike, staying in their safe, no-emotions-attached relationship.

Mike wasn't doing that. He was putting himself out there, for Tina, for the girl he had had a crush on the past two years. And maybe Eleven could do the same. Maybe she could give Sean an actual shot.

Her phone buzzed with a message. She grabbed it and saw Mike's name on it.

Wheeler my boy

I didn't sleep with Tina. I'm sorry we didn't get to come home together last night.

The only reason why Eleven didn't cry was because she was in the middle of a public place and still had some self-control over herself.

June, 20th. Tuesday. 23:41

“Okay, who would you marry, kiss or kill: Pennywise The Clown, Freddie Kruger, or Jason Voorhees.”

“Seriously, El, what the fuck?” Mike asked, stunned with the options she had given him before putting the joint he had just rolled between his lips. He rolled over to the edge of his bed and looked for a lighter in his night table’s drawers.

“What? It’s a good one,” Eleven replied, feeling personally offended that he didn’t like the challenge.

Mike laid back on the bed and glared playfully at her before lighting up the joint.

They were quiet for a while, Mike trying to come up with a fair answer and Eleven staring at him while playing with her black hoodie’s strings. She and Mike had spent the last few hours enjoying their well-deserved summer freedom – they had taken their last exam of the year that afternoon – by watching old episodes of Rick and Morty and smoking together. It had only taken one joint to get them into talking about weird shit and making up awful *marry, kill or kiss* rounds.

Resting on her stomach, Eleven’s phone buzzed.

Sean

I’ve got a plane ticket for June, 31st. We can get together before that, yeah? Pretty Please?

Eleven smiled at Sean’s sweetness and replied with an okay, she was free tomorrow if he wanted.

“Can’t I just kill them all?” Mike asked, the joint hanging between the two of them so she could take it.

“No, Mike, that’s now how the game goes,” she scowled before she took a drag.

“But...I can’t marry or kiss two of them, it’s like...” Mike shivered, disgusted with the idea.

“Fine, then I get to dare you to do something.”

“What?” Mike’s voice went two tones higher than his usual voice. “That’s now how the game works!”

Eleven chuckled, letting out bits of smoke between her lips.

“But you didn’t answer the challenge.”

Mike turned to her, holding himself up by his elbow, and stared at her with an offended expression.

“I’m sorry, but *could you answer that?*” He challenged.

Eleven stared at him, blinking her eyes innocently as she took another drag from the joint. They remained like that for a bit until she puffed the smoke in his direction and Mike made a face.

“God, you’re awful,” he complained, laying on his back again. “And give me that –“ He took the joint from her hands –“You don’t deserve it. I rolled it with love and friendship.”

Eleven laughed and rolled to her side, wrapping an arm around Mike’s waist and resting her chin on his shoulder. She felt her phone drop somewhere between their bodies.

“Mikeeee,” she sung his name in a sweet tone. He refused to look at her, so she slid her body up, her face coming closer to his. “Mikeeee.”

They hadn’t kissed sober for weeks now. They hadn’t done anything *sexual* sober for a while now. When they got drunk, or high, they got stripped down from whatever kept them from acting on their urges while sober, and eventually ended up kissing and sleeping together. It was weird. Something had changed in the past few weeks, but neither wanted to talk out loud about it. Neither wanted to admit that something had to change, sooner or later.

“Mikeeee,” she called a third time, puckering her lips out in a pout.

Mike finally turned his head to her. He stared at her in the eyes for a few seconds and then, almost unconsciously, leaned in, and his lips met hers in a tender touch. Eleven gave into the kiss, like she always did, breathing heavily from her nostrils, her body following Mike's movements. She kissed him back with delight, enjoying the gentleness of the kiss, the slow motion of their lips caressing one another, coming together in a sweet, relaxing touch.

They pulled back after a while. Eleven opened her eyes and met Mike's longing stare. His pupils were so dilated you could barely see the brown of his iris. Surely it had something to do with the drugs, but Eleven knew it had been from the kiss as well.

Her hand found its way into Mike's hair, like it always did, and Mike's lips broke into a happy smile.

"You know," he started in a throaty voice, "it's unbelievable how I cannot literally stay mad at for more than one minute."

Eleven smiled, her eyes filled with absolute contentment.

"Have you ever stayed mad at me for an entire minute?" She asked, daring.

Mike pressed his lips together as he thought of an answer.

"Well, no, not really."

Eleven giggled and leaned in to kiss him again.

Between their bodies, her phone suddenly buzzed. Mike pulled back and looked down at it before grabbing it and giving it to her.

Eleven rolled to her back and opened the message she had just got.

Sean

Awesome. I know a great ice-cream place we can go to. I'll pick you up at 4?

Eleven replied *sounds good*, and then put her phone into silent mood, no buzzing, no nothing, and moved back to cuddle with Mike, who was lighting the joint again.

“What’s up?” Mike asked.

“Oh, going out with Sean tomorrow,” Eleven said, laying her head on his chest and dropping an arm over his waist, her hand sneaking inside his t-shirt and caressing his skin.

Mike nodded, taking a drag from the joint. He glanced at her, exhaling the smoke.

“You guys are serious?”

Eleven shrugged. Were they? Well, they could be, but not really. And the last time she was in this kind of situation she was sixteen and the boy could not make up his mind about what he wanted with her.

“Are you and Tina?” Eleven asked back.

Mike’s answer was a shrug too.

For second, Eleven thought she could take a deep breath and relax. They were still on the same page, still unsure of what their next step should be. Whatever they had going on for three years now was probably safe.

Then, Mike opened his mouth, “I might ask her to be my girlfriend, but not now.”

Eleven’s heart skipped a beat. And not a joyful, happy beat, but a dreadful one. One that made her entire body freeze.

“Why not now?”

“We’re going on summer vacation. She lives miles away from Hawkins. We’ll never see each other, so... what’s the point of starting a relationship now?”

“So she won’t forget you during summer?”

Fuck, why did I give him that idea?

Mike's voice came out a bit scared, "Do you think she will?"

Eleven tried to get out of the topic by shrugging her shoulders. Despite Mike's body having always been her favourite pillow, suddenly she felt uncomfortable, almost as if this wasn't her place to be, and so moved away, laying on her side of the bed again.

"Maybe I'll talk to her. I don't know," Mike said, more than himself than to her. Then, he looked over at Eleven and passed her the joint. "Is Sean going to ask you to be his girlfriend?"

Eleven rolled her eyes.

"I'm not a mind reader, Wheeler."

Mike nodded almost solemnly, clearly too high to even behave normal. Suddenly, his lips broke into a goofy smile.

"Imagine if you had powers. How sick it would be."

Eleven puffed the joint's smoke in his direction, making him wave his hand in front of his face.

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Well, maybe in another universe, you have," Mike said, turning his head to her.

Eleven raised an eyebrow.

"Parallel universes-talk, really?"

Mike shrugged and glanced down, almost as a shy little boy who was confessing his crimes after torturing his older sister's doll.

"Isn't life easier to live with if you believe there are dozens and dozens of other parallel universes with dozens of yous doing something different?" He asked in a bashful tone.

Eleven put the joint between her lips and inhaled as she thought of

an answer. Her eyes met Mike's, and they stayed quiet, looking at each other, while she held the smoke in her throat.

Mike had distinct stages of being high, being the first one joking around with the silliest things and the second one having cravings for sweets. They usually reached those two with one joint, but they had already smoked more than one, so, right now, he had reached the stage of deep, philosophical, yet a bit sci-fi, conversation bullshit that always fascinated Eleven.

"Maybe we're not doing something different," she ended up saying. "Maybe in many of those parallel universes we're doing this."

"What? Lying in bed and getting high?"

"Yeah."

Mike's lips curled into a childlike smile.

Eleven gave him the joint and he immediately took it to his lips, inhaling a big drag. She stared at him, being too high to realize that maybe she shouldn't look so much at her best friend, who was only her best friend and nothing more. But she wanted to look at Mike. Mike was pretty. Mike's face was a piece of art, with his freckles and his fleshy lips, the way his eyes reflected so obviously what he was thinking, what he was feeling. He was an open book.

"Do you think," Mike's voice sounded shy, "do you think that there is a parallel universe in which we are, you know, together?"

"Together-together?"

"Yeah."

Eleven waited until Mike looked at her to answer.

"Yes."

It was more than obvious, wasn't it? In some other parallel universe, there were a Mike Wheeler and a Jane 'Eleven' Ives that had fallen in love with each other, like two normal people did, instead of playing around with fire and emotions for three long years.

June, 21st. Wednesday. 16:54

“When do you come back?” Eleven asked as she dug her silver spoon into her strawberry with chocolate sprinkles ice-cream, one hand holding the small fancy bowl it had come in.

“Oh, for next year?” Sean asked, licking his spoon. His two balls of ice-cream were mint-savour green with rasps of vanilla over it. They matched his green shirt, which, Eleven had to admit, looked really good on him.

“Yeah, for next year,” Eleven confirmed.

“Hum I don’t know. Classes begin mid-September, so I’ll probably be back a couple of days before, you know, to settle in and all. Why?”

Eleven shrugged, taking a big spoon of ice-cream into her mouth.

Sean smirked.

“Are you going to miss me, Eleven?” He tried to ask in a teasing voice, but there was a clear hint of hope.

Eleven pressed her lips together into a forced smile.

Thank God her mouth was full of ice-cream because she didn’t know what to say to Sean.

Was she going to miss him? Well, yeah, sure. Not as much as she would probably miss Max, but she had grown used to having Sean around, so, of course, she would notice his absence for the next months. But that wouldn’t be enough for him, would it now? Because he wanted her to miss him dearly. He wanted her to miss him like they were more than friends. And she wasn’t sure she could give that to him.

Because Eleven was going to have Mike around. How could she miss and long for anyone else when she had her best friend next to her, keeping her company, being and giving her everything she wanted?

“Well, we can always text each other, right?” Sean added, and Eleven noticed that a strand of his light brown hair had fallen over his forehead, wrecking his perfect hairdo. “And...facetime?”

Eleven licked her lips, cleaning them of any trace of ice-cream, and this time her smile wasn't as forced as before.

“Yeah, of course, Sean.”

It was almost six pm when she got back to her dorms, only to find Max packing her clothes for the summer.

“Oh!” Eleven let her purse fall to the floor and placed both hands over her chest. Her best friend snorted at her behaviour. “My dear Max, you're flying away from me.”

Max rolled her eyes.

“You're going away too, you bitch.”

Lowering her hands, Eleven smiled at her best friend, and then skipped her way to where she was, surprising her with a sudden hug.

“Ugh, El, come on.”

Max could only be sweet to another human being when she was drunk.

“When do you leave?” Eleven asked, moving away to go sit down on her bed.

“Tonight. My parents are picking me up.”

“Ooh, your parents.”

Max glared at her. “Don't.”

Max had been adopted three times throughout her childhood. In the first two times, she ran away from her new family, refusing to accept them as such. Whenever she was found, the families refused to take her back, having no desire to keep a runaway kid, so she ended up going back into the system. And there she remained until she was

fourteen and this lovely couple, who had never been able to have children, decided to adopt *her*, a teenager instead of a sweet, innocent baby. For years, Max refused to call them ‘mom’ or ‘dad’, but things had changed a bit since she came to college.

“I like your parents. They are cool,” Eleven said with honesty.

“Yeah, whatever,” Max muttered, but there was a small smile on her lips. “When are you and the boys going back to the most exciting city in the world?”

Eleven let herself fall back on her bed and groaned.

“In three days. The bus trip is going to be awful. It’s ten hours inside that thing.”

“You can always make out with Mike to pass the time,” Max joked.

Eleven didn’t react to the joke. Yeah, in the past, that might have happened. Yeah, they would only do it when Dustin fell asleep so they wouldn’t bother him. And yeah, they would always be sober when they decided to make out with each other in a bus full of people. But things had changed since then.

“What’s wrong?” Max asked, staring at Eleven with concern.

Eleven sighed and sat up. She pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms around them.

“Things are different between Mike and me.”

“Why?” Max laid down one last folded shirt in her suitcase before sitting on her bed and giving Eleven all her attention.

“It has changed since Tina and Sean came along. Like, we aren’t serious with them. But... Mike told me he’s going to ask Tina to be his girlfriend after summer. He doesn’t want to do it now because they are going to be apart for the next months, but, if things are still good when we come back for classes next fall, then yeah...”

Eleven wanted to be happy for her best friend, she really did. However, being happy for him, supporting him in finally asking the

girl he liked to be his girlfriend, meant that a change was coming. A change in their relationship.

“You’re scared that you guys won’t be able to remain friends, aren’t you?”

Eleven hesitated before nodding.

Max sighed.

“You two should have broken it off a long time ago.”

Eleven’s went wide-eyed. She felt offended.

“It’s true, El,” Max stated with no sympathy. “Friends-with-benefits things aren’t supposed to last for three years. They aren’t even supposed to be exclusive.”

“We aren’t exclusive.”

“You two have only slept with each other,” Max reminded her. “You’re too attached to each other in ways that it’s not a friendship. Not anymore.”

Eleven sent Max a harsh look.

“You’re not making me feel better.”

Max seemed unresponsive to the accusation.

“I don’t know how to make you feel better without lying to you.”

Eleven raised an eyebrow, confused with her friend’s words.

But instead of explain herself, Max shook her head and stood up, going back to packing her suitcase.

“I’m not going to do this right now, El. I’m sorry.”

Eleven was going to open her mouth and say something, demand Max to keep telling her the truth, no matter how bad it could be, but she heard her phone buzzing from her purse. She stood up and went to get it. There were three unread messages.

Wheeler my boy

Remember when I say I was going to talk to Tina? Well, she came to talk to me first. We're going to enjoy our summers and next fall we'll see how we're doing.

Eleven breathed heavily from her nostrils and bit her tongue.

Why was this easy for Mike? How could he tell her everything that was going on with his almost-to-be relationship with Tina while she felt awkward whenever she had to mention Sean's name to him?

Instead of answering his message, she opened the other two messages.

Sean

Is it silly that I'm already dreading the fact that we will only see each other in September again?

Maybe. Maybe it is, Sean. But Eleven decided to be nice with him, because, let's be real, Sean deserved it (he had been putting up with her for almost a month and hadn't given up on her yet) and replied *everything about you is silly, Sean*, before moving to the third message.

Chocolate Pudding

I've got the tickets. You guys are owing me, like, thirty bucks each. The bus will leave at seven am. El, do you want to crash with us? Our place is closer to the bus stop than the dorms.

Eleven wrote down *sure, sweet Dustin, I'll pay you back as soon as we see each other.*

She was about to block her phone when another message from Sean came in. She looked at his name for a few seconds and then decided to ignore it. She threw her phone onto her bed and took one look at Max, who was humming as she packed her pyjamas.

As quiet as a cat, Eleven approached her best friend and surprised her with another hug from behind.

“Honestly, El!” Max said, trying to act out mad.

“Aren’t you going to miss me, Max?” Eleven asked in a tiny, sad voice.

Max only snorted, sarcastic, as an answer.

“We won’t see each other for two months and you can’t even say it once that you’re going to miss your dear best friend?” Eleven kept talking.

Max looked behind her shoulder, glancing at Eleven, who had her head tilted so she could meet her gaze.

“If you went MIA for two months, I would miss you, but I know you’re going to fill me with messages, videos and songs in Facebook, so yeah, no, I’m not going to say it,” Max retorted.

Eleven puckered her lips in a sad pout and blinked her innocent eyes a few times. No word was needed to be said.

Max sighed.

“Fine, I’m going to miss you, El, you crazy bean.”

Eleven delighted in her best friend’s words and tightened her arms around her.

“Bah, El, you’re suffocating me!”

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

Here's the third chapter. I hope you guys enjoy it.

June, 24th. Saturday. 8:34.

The sound of a photo being taken made Eleven open her eyes. Next to her, Mike, who she thought had been sleeping, was actually on his knees, body leaning over his bus seat, and had his cell phone on his hands. There was an amused expression on his face, lips curled in a half-smirk and a spark of sneakiness in his eyes.

Eleven stretched her arms to the front before sitting up right, the blanket falling from her body. She blinked, confused, not remembering having covered herself.

“What are you doing?” She asked Mike in a whisper. Almost everyone around them was sleeping, as a logical consequence of having woken up before seven am and as a way of spending the ten hours they had to go through inside that terrible bus.

“Taking pictures of Dustin,” Mike answered. The small chuckle, a sound of genuine happiness and slyness, that followed his words got Eleven curious. She turned around on her seat and went up on her knees as well.

Dustin was sitting next to this old lady whose hair was all white and lips were painted in a vibrant red lipstick. They were both sleeping right now, the old lady very peacefully, while Dustin let out short snores, his head laying on the lady's shoulder. They were sharing a pink blanket with little sheep on it.

Eleven swallowed her laugh and pressed both her hands over her mouth, trying to keep it together. Next to her, Mike was finding another angle before taking a new picture.

“This is so cute,” she managed to say without bursting into loud chuckles.

Mike snickered.

“Yeah, and I’m going to use it against him for the rest of his life.”

After a couple of more pictures, they decided to call it quits and sat back down on their seats. Mike grabbed the blanket that Eleven had accidentally dropped on the floor and shook it wide open, laying it over their laps.

“I’m going to send one to Tina. She’s going to love it,” Mike said with a proud expression, his fingers hovering over his cell phone’s screen.

Eleven stared at him with a sudden sadness squeezing her heart so hard to the point that it hurt.

Mike looked happy.

Letting out a sigh, she turned her body away from her best friend and rested her head against the bus window. She tucked the blanket better over her lap, hiding her hands under it, and then closed her eyes.

Sleep didn’t come to her, but she pretended it did.

When Mike’s soft voice called out for her, asking if she was awake, she didn’t move, breathing in and out at a slow, sleeping pace. It was a shitty move, but she would rather fake sleep than hear how excited Mike’s voice got whenever he said Tina’s name.

You’re jealous because your best friend is moving on and finding someone to love while you’re stuck in not giving Sean a chance and wanting to remain in the past, her own voice criticized her.

There wasn’t a lie being told there, that was for sure. She just didn’t want to admit that she feared any kind of change; that if she could choose between having Mike as her best friend and sex buddy forever or moving on and falling in love with someone good, she would pick the first one without hesitation. Because it was safe. It was Mike and he was safe.

Suddenly, she felt hands over her body. Recognizing Mike’s tender touch, she let him move her body into another position. Her head

met his shoulder and the blanket's warm was pulled up to her neckline. She took the opportunity to rub her cheek against Mike's shoulder and sighed happily.

In return, Mike kissed her hair and laid his head on top of hers.

She didn't cry, being stronger than that, but the dreadful feeling of weakness as tears tried to intrude her closed eyes was there.

Halfway through the journey, the bus came to a stop. For a snack and toilet break of twenty minutes, announced the bus driver through the speakers. Eleven opened her eyes, confused, having in fact half-slept throughout the last hours, and looked around. Realizing people were standing up, she stretched her arms up and then rubbed her eyes. She watched as Mike put his phone back in his jeans' pocket and stood up. He turned to wake up Dustin, but stopped his hands mid-air, a chuckle coming out of his throat.

"I'm up. Don't touch me," Eleven heard Dustin's sleepy voice.

She raised herself up on the seat and peeked over the bus seats. The old lady was also awake, so the two shared a quick, friendly smile before Eleven turned to Dustin. The boy was lazily trying to fix his brown curls, while he was bothered by Mike's hand which kept tapping him on the arm.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry," Mike chanted every time his hand touched Dustin's arm.

"Dude, I'm going to kill you." Dustin put on his snapback with Hawkins' written on it and stood up. "Jeez, let's go."

They were at a service station, a small social place in the middle of the highway. The thirty bus passengers scattered around the station, taking up lines in the food section and in the bathroom. The three of them decided to split chores: while Dustin went to the bathroom, El went to get a table and Mike stood in line to order a quick snack for them. Then, Eleven and Dustin switched, and, at last, Dustin took Mike's place in the line as the boy went to the toilets.

"Okay, so we got three chocolate croissants and three cans of juice:

the orange one is for you –“ Dustin gave the can to Eleven. He then grabbed the mix fruit can – “this one is for you, Michael, and I get the pear.”

Mike and Eleven made a disgusted face.

“Pear,” they scowled together, then smiled at each other.

They ate in a hurry, wanting to go back to the bus before people started lining up in there to get in.

“I don’t care what you guys say, but when we take the bus back, one of you will take the seat next to a stranger,” Dustin complained as they walked back to the bus.

“Dude, next time don’t pick the smallest joint,” Mike reminded him.

Eleven laughed as she remembered last night, when she had got to the boys’ flat and Mike had had three joints resting on the kitchen table. They had gathered around it and he had put them inside one of Dustin’s snapbacks. After shaking it for a bit, they had had to pick one with their eyes closed. The one that got the smallest joint had to sit next to a stranger in the bus ride. Dustin was the unlucky one.

“Yeah, but next time I don’t get to play and one of *you two* goes,” he stated with a stern nod before hopping inside the bus.

Mike and Eleven shared a sympathetic look with each other before following their friend inside.

They still had five hours on the road, having another break in two and half hours. Mike’s mother, Karen Wheeler, who was the sweetest person you could possibly meet in your entire life, called him right after the bus driver started the engine and drove them back onto the highway. Mike talked to her for five minutes, giving her Eleven and Dustin’s excited hellos, and then promised to call her back in case the ride got delayed for whatever reason. She was the one that was going to pick them up at the bus station. Eleven’s mother had a late afternoon shift, probably getting home around midnight and Dustin’s parents worked confusing hours as well.

Most people on the bus were awoken now (it was eleven am) and

someone asked the bus driver to turn on the radio. As soon as Charlie Puth's *Attention* song echoed through the bus speakers, Mike groaned while Eleven turned to him, sitting up straight, and started to sing dramatically.

"No, don't do that!" Mike exclaimed, offended.

"What? What is wrong with Charlie Puth, Mike?" Eleven asked him, resting an arm on her seat back.

"I don't like his songs," Mike said with a shrug.

Elven rolled her eyes and changed her sitting position.

"You're such a hipster."

Mike looked back at her, offended.

"What? No, I'm not."

Eleven glanced at him and frowned her lips in a mean face. Mike laughed at it and stretched an arm towards her, letting it fall over her shoulders before pulling her closer to him.

"Dude!" Eleven exclaimed, putting a hand on the hard armrest between their seats as a way of protecting her body from getting smashed against it.

Mike let her go and touched his chest over the heart, making a sad face.

"Don't you like it when I hug you, El?" He asked in a tiny, gloomy voice.

Eleven rolled her eyes and hit his arm playfully.

"You're ridiculous."

We're ridiculous.

"Oh, and why is that? Because I don't like Charlie Puth?" Mike questioned, cocking his chin in a defying way.

Eleven tried not to roll her eyes again and shook her head disappointed.

“No, because you’re a snobby hipster who doesn’t want to admit what he is.”

Mike put his hand over his heart again.

They heard movement coming from the seats behind them and suddenly Dustin’s head popped up over them, his phone in his right hand.

“Guys, we need to make a list of places to visit in Hawkins.”

Mike blinked, confused. “What? Why? We live there.”

“Ceci is going to visit me in three weeks!” Dustin announced excited. “And then in August I’m going to visit her hometown.”

Eleven snorted, amused, as Mike’s mouth fell open.

“Dude, you guys can’t stay two months apart?” He asked, shocked.

Dustin’s face went serious as he thought about it for a second.

“Well, we could,” he admitted, “but... why would we do that if we can go visit each other and meet new fun cities?”

Eleven laughed.

“Hawkins is not a fun city,” Mike criticized.

“What? Yes, it is,” Eleven argued. Mike looked at her like she had lost her mind. “What? I like Hawkins. It’s nice.”

“Yeah, that’s because you haven’t lived your entire life there,” Mike replied.

“Guys, we’re-“ Dustin got interrupted by the old lady next to him telling him to sit down. “Oh, okay, Meryl, I’ll sit down in just a sec- Oh, fine.” Dustin’s head disappeared from over their seats.

Mike and Eleven chuckled. On the radio, a new song came on.

“Oh, this one, this one is good,” Mike commented as he moved his head to the beat of Lily Allen’s *Fuck you* tune.

Eleven looked at him with an eyebrow raised.

“What? It’s good!” Mike said.

She had to agree with him.

June, 24th. Saturday. 13h45.

The bus stopped at another service station. Mike, Eleven and Dustin used the same scheme as before to get food, a table and time to go to the bathroom, but this time they tried to speed it up even more so that they could go find a nice spot to smoke a joint.

“I needed one of these two and half hours ago,” Dustin stated, passing the joint to Eleven, smoking coming out of his mouth.

They were sitting on a sidewalk, behind some parked cars. From there you could see the bus, but remain hidden from any eavesdroppers.

“We didn’t have time, then,” Mike said. For this break, the bus driver had given them half an hour. “El, hurry up. I want to smoke.”

“You’ve had your turn,” she replied.

“But I want a second one.”

Eleven was about to roll her eyes at his whining when a sudden kind of feather, yet firm touch came in contact with her sides as Mike tickled her.

“Noo!” She shouted and abruptly stood up. She pointed a finger at Mike, who raised his hands in surrender. Dustin was laughing. “I am not giving this to you if you tickle me again, Michael.”

Eleven didn’t like tickles, and, weirdly enough, it wasn’t because they made her laugh. Oh no, she hated them because they kind of, well,

hurt her. It wasn't a painful feeling, but a rather uncomfortable one. Mike knew this, but he always liked to test her.

"I'm sorry. Won't happen again," Mike said in his very solemn voice. The kind of voice he used when he wanted to make a promise.

Eleven believed in him and sat down again.

"Now, I need a lighter."

Dustin gave her his.

"You have a serious problem with tickling, don't you?" He asked.

Eleven glared at him. Dustin looked shocked and, if someone ever asked, yeah, a bit frightened as well.

"What? It's just a question."

"You've known me for five years, Dustin."

"Yeah, and I was checking in on you and your tickling problem."

Mike started to laugh, but one glare from Eleven made him swallow it down.

They got back on the bus, being the last ones to arrive and receiving a harsh look from the bus driver.

The last two hours of the ride, according to Mike, would be the slowest of them all.

"You're such a positive person," Eleven joked, leaning her head back on her seat and looking at Mike, who was currently playing a game on his cell phone. It had something to do with finding words in a set of five or six letters. She frowned, taking a good look at his phone screen. "Dude, you're on level 143?"

Mike beamed with pride and said, "*And* I started playing it only a few days ago."

Eleven's eyebrows raised in wonder. Then, she frowned and leaned

over, putting a hand on his arm.

“Do you need help, Mike? Or friends?”

“Oh, fuck off.”

Eleven giggled.

Despite having made fun of the game, she leaned in, laying her head on Mike’s shoulder, and tried to help him find the last two words to finish the level.

“Pasty?”

“There is no s, El.”

“Paty, then.”

“That’s not even a word,” he retorted.

They went quiet for a while, Eleven half-closing her eyes, the effects from the joint they had smoked making her sleepy. Plus, having her cheek comfortably resting on Mike’s shoulder made it even better. The t-shirt he had chosen to wear was soft and she would find herself rubbing her skin against it. And his body temperature was warmer than hers; it had a sense of familiarity. Honestly, it might sound crazy, but Eleven was sure she could recognize Mike’s body temperature anywhere. And his smell or his laugh.

Would Mike recognize those things about her too? If someone blindfolded him, would he manage to find Eleven through feeling her body temperature, or hearing her laugh, or sensing her body’s odour? Would he recognize her face by touching it?

Sometimes, she felt that she had given too much to this friendship. To this limbo of a friendship and relationship. Sometimes, it hurt her to think that, maybe, just maybe, she liked Mike more than he liked her.

When they first started drunk hooking up, Eleven hadn’t given it any thoughts. Yeah, Mike was her best friend, but he was cute and, after the first time it happened, she realized he was an amazing kisser as well. But when people started assuming they were dating, in those

times, Eleven had given whatever was happening between her and Mike *a lot of thought*. Why did it keep happening? Why did it start happening when they were sober? Why did they give each other their virginity?

Was it because it was easy, like eating cereal for lunch instead of cooking was easy, or did it have meaning?

With time, Eleven came to realize that it had meaning; whatever they were doing had a lot of meaning. At least, to her, it did.

“El?”

“Hum?”

“Would you rather be stung by a Japanese wasp or watch your parents have sex?”

Eleven’s eyes went wide-opened. She raised her head and looked at Mike, who was still very entertained by his little word-game.

When she didn’t speak, he glanced at her.

“So? Which one?”

Eleven closed her eyes for a second, an amused laugh spreading through her body, before she looked back at Mike with a you-are-unbelievable kind of smile.

“Well, I don’t even know who my dad is, Michael, so...”

“Yeah, but you know who your mom is, so...” He argued back.

Eleven shook her head.

“You’re such an idiot. I’ll pick the second one,” she answered.

Mike looked at her, his mouth open in horrifying disgust.

Eleven frowned and asked, “Do you know how big Japanese wasps are?”

“No. But I don’t want to know how big my dad’s dick is either!” Mike

remarked.

Eleven was not expecting that comment from Mike. When her brain truly processed what he had just said, connecting it to the image of a fifty-year-old Ted Wheeler sleeping in his La-Z-Boy recliner, Eleven started laughing really loud, holding on to her stomach.

Mike just stared at her offended and Dustin's head popped out again from his seat, wanting to find out what was so funny.

June, 24th. Wednesday. 16h45

Karen Wheeler was a medium-height woman who had her light brown hair combed in an 80s style hairdo that she could pull off without a stress, and the typical smile of a proud mother who dedicated her life to bringing up her children. She was waiting for the three of them by her red car, excited to finally see her son and his two good friends, who she had known for ages and had fed more than a billion times, after five long months.

The first person she hugged was Eleven. She pulled the girl into a tight hug, kissing her cheek soundly.

Make gasped melodramatically.

“My own mother!”

“Oh shush, Michael,” Karen waved her hand at him and then pulled Dustin into a bear hug.

Mike's hand shot to his chest over his heart, and he pouted. Eleven patted his arm in reassurance.

“I can't believe my mother chose to hug my two friends before hugging *me*, her son!”

“Oh, come here, you,” Karen opened her arms to finally give him a hug.

Mike lost the sad boy attitude and sent his mother a sharp look. “Oh,

I don't want it now."

Karen raised an eyebrow at him, challenging him. Mike gave in; he approached her, leaned down to kiss her forehead – because he was much taller than she was –, and then walked away to the car's trunk.

During their half an hour drive to Hawkins, Karen Wheeler filled them with questions regarding the last five months, even though she had spoken with Mike almost every day on the phone, and occasionally Eleven and Dustin had actually called her. They loved Karen. She was just the best.

"Mom, we've told you everything already."

"Oh, there has to be something!" Karen said with a big smile.

Eleven was almost tempted to say that Mike was seeing someone, throwing that in to see how his mother would react and, more importantly, what *he* would say about it. Would he admit it? Would he say she was lying, or exaggerating?

"Dustin has a girlfriend," Mike announced out of blue.

"Dude!"

"Oh Dustin!" Karen beamed in thrill. "Tell me everything."

Dustin muttered something under his breath, probably cursing Mike for exposing him like that, and then spent the rest of the trip talking about Ceci, how they had met and the trip she was taking to Hawkins in three weeks.

"Oh, we're going to meet her? That's so sweet!"

Eleven and Mike's eyes crossed halfway through Dustin showing Karen pictures of Ceci. They smiled at each other, both amused with their friend's growing enthusiasm while talking about his girlfriend. Karen's excitement also encouraged him to share more information than he initially had wanted.

Karen dropped Eleven home first, promising for Mike that he would come pick up her up later for dinner, since her mother was working

until late, and then drove away, going into Dustin's house direction.

The Ives' house was a small building in a street mostly populated by middle class traditional families. Its walls were painted in light yellow and there was a balcony that covered the entire first floor's front. It had two sliding doors, one on each corner of the balcony, leading to Eleven and Terry's respective bedrooms.

Entering the house, Eleven's nostrils were immediately filled with a sweet scent, probably from something baked. Terry Ives liked to bake on her free time. Eleven smiled and took a look around their modest living-room, the walls decorated with old pictures of both mother and daughter; the sofa had an old red and black blanket covering its back and the TV was hanging on the wall, between two bookshelves.

Then, she crossed the hall and climbed up the stairs, dragging her two bags of clothes with her. There were three doors on the first floor: one belonging to the bathroom, one to her bedroom and another to the main bedroom, which, of course, was her mother's. Eleven's bedroom was the one at the end of the corridor.

The room wasn't big. Her single bed took almost all space against the wall on the right, followed by an old wardrobe which had its wooden doors covered in stickers. On the left side of the room, three shelves hung on the wall above her white desk, which was next a small wooden cabinet with four long drawers. In parallel to the room's entrance stood the balcony's sliding door, hidden behind yellow-transparent curtains.

The first time Eleven had entered this house she was fifteen and her mother was right behind her, worried and scared of her daughter's reaction to their new place. They had lived in Indianapolis for as long as Eleven remembered. At the age of twelve, she had watched her mother get married to a man called Martin Brenner. The marriage lasted two and half years. Martin had been too obsessed with his work. He would spend weeks working late in the office, sometimes not even coming home, preferring to crash in a hotel bedroom near his company's building. Gradually, Terry had got tired of it and their fights had got bigger.

Do you like this place?, her mother had asked her nervously. With a

sympathetic smile, Eleven had approached her and given her a tight hug. It wasn't home at the time, but it would soon become it.

Eleven put down her two bags of clothes on top of her bed, and then removed her backpack from her shoulders. That one went to sit on the desk. She took out her laptop and some books she wouldn't be using anymore next year. They would go up on one of the shelves.

The rest of the afternoon was spent storing her clothes; jeans, dresses and soft kind of blouses hung in her wardrobe and all her t-shirts, pyjamas and sweatshirts went into the cabinet's drawers. She also took the time to look at her old scrapbook. It had pictures, small notes and souvenirs from the days she had lived in Indianapolis and then, a cut newspaper article about Hawkins and the remodelled arcade from the 80s that was re-opened after years of being closed appeared. After it, there was a worn-out bill from a supermarket and a small description under it: *Mike Wheeler is a cool English partner.*

When she was done with it, smiling at almost every picture she had glued there, she went to have a quick snack while she sent Mike a text message, saying that he could come pick her up whenever he wanted.

He was there in fifteen minutes.

"You know I could have made you walk to my place, right? It's only a fifteen-minute walk," he teased as soon as she got in the car.

"Yeah, but you also like to take any opportunity you get to drive your mom's car, so..." She threw back with a smirk.

Mike caressed the car's wheel.

"It's a good car," he sighed. "I want it someday."

Eleven rolled her eyes, putting on her seatbelt.

"Just drive."

Mike chuckled and looked behind him to check that no cars were coming before taking his mom's car into the road.

“Is Dustin going to be there too?” Eleven asked after a while.

“Nah, it’s my parents, Holly, you and me.”

There was a quiet moment.

“When you say ‘parents’...”

“Yeah, my dad is going to be there too.”

Eleven could see how tense Mike suddenly got through how he had clenched his chin. It wasn’t that Ted Wheeler was a bad father, but a father who had had different expectations for his only son, who didn’t fulfil them for him. Ted hated that Mike had chosen a Bachelor’s course that, in his point of view, was a dead end. He had wanted him to go be a doctor, or a lawyer, or an engineer, but Mike didn’t want that. He had always wanted to write, to be creative in what he was doing, to know worldwide History, and, if it had to come to that, to teach. His mind was too wired to its creative side, to its imagination and passion about things, about what is intangible, that becoming what his father had wanted him to become would have crushed him.

“You guys still don’t talk much, huh?” Eleven asked, watching as Mike made a turn to the street where his family lived.

Mike shrugged.

“We kind of talk. Now, he has other goals for me. Can you get the garage’s controller, please?”

Eleven opened the glove compartment. She took the controller out and pointed it in the garage’s gate direction, clicking on it. The gate started opening.

“What kind of goals?” Eleven asked.

“Oh, the usual ones,” Mike answered, clearly trying to avoid talking about it.

Eleven stared at him, frowning.

Mike drove the car into the garage.

“Like what, Mike?” Eleven asked, making no move to get out of the car. She was worried about him. Mike didn’t deal well with his father’s pressure.

Her best friend sighed.

“Well, like... family.”

Eleven blinked.

“Family?”

“Yup,” Mike emphasized on the ‘p’. Behind them, the garage’s gate started closing. “He wants me to start a good nice family like he did. That’s his goal now.”

Eleven didn’t know how to reply. She wanted to say that it was completely insane, that he was too young and should be focusing on his studies, and not on *starting a family*, but Mike was sensitive when it came to his father and he would probably defend the man if she implied anything bad about him.

“And what do you think of it?” Eleven asked.

Mike shrugged.

“I don’t know.” But he knew. He just didn’t want to talk about it.

Holly came to greet Eleven as soon as she saw her walking in the Wheeler’s living-room, wrapping her in a hug.

“Hey Holly,” Eleven said, rubbing the girl’s back.

“I missed you, El!”

Holly was eleven years old and her role model, for unknown reasons, was Eleven. The first time Mike took El home with him to work on their English project, five years ago, the youngest Wheeler took one look at Eleven, socialized with her for five minutes and then later that day, during dinner, admitted in front of the all family that when

she grew up, she wanted to be just like Mike's new friend.

"I missed you too, Holly Jolly. You have to tell me all big news!"

Holly's eyes brightened even more up. Mike rolled his eyes and made his way out of the living-room, knowing that the two girls would get so involved in catching up that they wouldn't even notice him. And, if he were completely honest, it got quite boring when all he did, when Holly was trying to impress El with all her school stories, was stand quiet like a statue. He learned a long time ago to just let them be.

"Son, come here."

Mike, who was about to open his bedroom's door, looked up and saw his father climbing the last steps of the stairs. He blinked.

"What is it, Dad?"

His father approached him in a slow pace, a newspaper in his hands. Mike sighed.

"Look at this."

Ted Wheeler opened the newspaper on a page that announced the wedding of Jennifer Hayes, Mike's first girlfriend, who his father did not know about, and a guy named Bruce Martins. There was a picture of the happy couple, smiling at each other, she dressed in white and he in a black suit.

"Weren't they in your class a few years ago?" Ted asked.

Mike stared at him before nodding.

Ted beamed in joy, pointing at the picture. "Isn't this great? They got married two days ago, Michael. *And the newspaper talked about it.*"

Yeah, because Hawkins was a small town and you could easily pay the only newspaper in it to write about you.

"You can have that too, son," Ted added.

Mike stared at his father's excited eyes, trying to understand the man.

"What do you think of it?" Ted asked, seeing his son too quiet.

But Mike didn't reply. He just gave a big-ass, fake smile to his father before excusing himself and going into the bathroom. He locked the door, sat down on the toilet seat and took a deep breath, pushing away all the sudden anger and frustration that had spread all over his body. His hands were shaking and he had to bite his bottom lip, forbidding it from trembling.

He tried to understand his father, he really did. Mike was the only boy in the family; he was the son that Ted Wheeler had always dreamt about, and, until a certain age, he had been that perfect son, getting good grades, winning first place in science fairs, all that. But now, now he was a disappointment. When he had told his parents that he was going to study Creative Writing and History, his mother had been the personification of pride, accepting his choices, because that was Karen Wheeler, always waiting the best for you, but his dad... His dad had looked at him like was nuts. They got into fights, big awful fights. Yet, Mike kept his word, applied for college to study what he wanted to study, and got accepted into one with a full scholarship.

During his entire first year of college, he and his father barely acknowledged each other's presence, never talking on the phone, never asking about each other, nothing. That changed during last summer, after Karen had asked her son and her husband to try and get along. If they didn't want to do it for one another, at least, they could try to do it for her and for little Holly. So, Ted Wheeler, in his... perhaps naivety, tried to approach his son using conversations topics that could bring the two together. Ted chose girls and future and marriage. And Mike had wanted to hate him even more.

He didn't want to get married, he had almost told his father when the man first talked about it. He didn't even think about having long-term relationships, being too focused on his studies, on his friends and... on El. El and their friends-with-benefits agreement. But he couldn't have told that to his dad, could he now? No, Ted Wheeler couldn't deal with the fact that his son was seeing, but not dating, his best friend and had no intentions of having a serious relationship, of

getting married one day.

El doesn't believe in marriage, Mike found himself thinking. Her mother had been through some rough times in a sad marriage and El didn't want that to herself. Mike understood.

Well, you have Tina now.

Mike shook his head and stood up. He walked to the washbasin and took a long look at himself.

Tina was nice. He had had a crush on her for the past two years. They were getting along just great. But they had a summer vacation between them now. He didn't know how things were going to be in September and-

There was a knock on the door.

"Mike?"

It was El.

Trying to put on a happier attitude, Mike opened the door and flashed a cocky smile at his best friend.

"Yes, dear?"

Eleven almost rolled her eyes.

"Your dad stole your sister away from me. You have to entertain me now."

Mike chuckled and stepped forwards, almost touching her. He closed the door behind him, always looking at Eleven. She stared up at him with curiosity in her eyes and a small frown between her eyebrows.

So, but so many times had he hesitated in the past few weeks, but not this time – *no, not this time*, Mike thought; he leaned down to capture Eleven's lips in a passionate kiss. She immediately wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer.

They stumbled to the other side of the corridor, Mike pushing Eleven

against the wall, one of his hands moving under her shirt and the other squeezing her butt.

It was easy. So easy being with each other.

Eleven's body trembled under his as his hand found her chest, his fingers moving under her bra. Her hands pulled his hair hard and he groaned. She knew exactly what to do to get him go crazy.

They could have this forever.

Mike pulled back. Eleven opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Are you okay?" She asked.

Mike's lips curled into a small, soft smile. She knew him too well.

"I'm lucky, El," he said.

She frowned.

"Why?"

"Because I have you."

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & comments will mean the world to me.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, everyone.

Someone asked me about the songs I've mentioned or used in the last chapters. Here are them:

- I'm not in love by 10CC
- Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen
- Duele el Corazon by Enrique Iglesias
- Attention by Charlie Puth

I hope you guys are enjoying this story! I'm currently working on chapter 5 (almost done, yay!).

And thank you so much for all the hits, kudos and comments! They mean the world to me.

June, 25th. Sunday. 00:42

Mike had dropped Eleven home around eleven pm. They had made out in the car for a while, Eleven being pulled onto Mike's lap, grinding against him, moaning, hands everywhere and a deep-rooted need inside their bodies; they had to get closer. They had to be closer. Then, Mike's phone had rung, his mother demanding to know where he was since he should have been home thirty minutes ago. They had said their goodbyes and Eleven had watched him drive away before going inside.

She took a quick shower, leaving her hair out since she was too tired to use a hair-dryer or wait for it to dry on its own, and spent some time watching TV. Random episodes of Judge Judy were on, and she kind of liked them. She texted Mike, telling him about it, and he said he would go and watch as well. Then, he sent another message.

Wheeler my boy

My ex got married and my dad showed me a newspaper article about it.

Eleven frowned before typing down.

Why was there an article? And did he know Jennifer was an ex?

Eleven was sure Mike's parents never got to know about Jennifer. The two of them had dated for only a couple of months, never getting to introduce each other to their families. They had been sixteen, going seventeen. Meeting the parents had been out of the question.

But damn, Jennifer Hayes got married? She was the same age they were. And to whom did she get married?

Eleven's phone beeped with a message.

Wheeler my boy

They paid the newspaper, of course. You can do that, El. And no, he didn't know about her. But he thinks I should think more about marriage, I told you that.

Eleven bit her bottom lip, looking at their message and feeling Mike's distressed sorrow.

It was weird, really. For years, she had seen Ted Wheeler as a good fatherly role model. He tried to be there for Nancy, for Mike and for little Holly. He talked to his kids, he worked his ass off so they could have whatever they wanted... And, then, out of the blue, he and Mike clashed. He refused to accept Mike had goals that weren't the ones Ted had envisioned for his only son. And Mike suffered a lot with it, with the sudden absence of his father's approval.

Eleven typed down an answer.

I'm sorry. I don't know what to say, Mike... Maybe he'll stop bothering you with that?

A few minutes later, Mike replied.

Wheeler my boy

I don't know. I just don't get it. Why this topic? Jesus, he could bother me with sports or economics or the fucking state of the American government, but no, he wants to bond over marriage and my fucking thoughts on it, and I can't even tell him that I don't believe in that shit.

Eleven re-read his message more than once. This thing with his father wasn't something new. This was clearly something that had been bothering Mike for a while now. Why hadn't she known about it? Didn't they usually tell each other everything?

Well, they did spend the last five months without coming home. Mike got busy with school, then with Tina... Maybe those things made him forget a bit whatever had been happening back home. They distracted him, made him feel lighter... Because Mike had this thing in which, if something was bothering him too much, he had to find ways of getting rid of it; at least, from his mind. So, maybe that's what he did... Maybe he did it so well that he forgot to tell her about it.

But they always told each other everything.

The Ives' front door suddenly opened. Eleven sat up straight and looked over the sofa. Terry Ives showed up, still wearing her nurse uniform under a jacket, looking tired, with deep dark circles under her eyes. She was forty years old, had brownish hair like Eleven's and was very skinny. She had that kind of fast metabolism that many people envied.

“Mama,” Eleven breathed out, with a huge smile on her face. She stood up and went to hug her mother, who she had not seen for five months.

“Oh, sweetie.” Terry tightened her arms around her daughter’s torso. “I’ve missed you.”

“I missed you too, Mama.” Eleven pulled back and, frowning, took her mother’s face into her hands. “You look like you need to sleep, Mama. You’re tired.”

“I’ve been doing double shifts,” Terry admitted.

“Mama!”

Terry moved away and waved a hand in the air noncommittally.

“It’s fine. You know I can’t deal with too much free time. And I love working, Jane,” Terry said as she went to hang her purse and jacket on the coat rack. “Anyways, you have to tell me how your trip home went and-“

“Mama,” Eleven interrupted her in a tender voice. “It’s better if you go to bed. We can talk to tomorrow, and after tomorrow and the day after, and next week and -“She shrugged, smiling -“We have two months to talk, Mama. Now you need to sleep.”

Terry took a long look at her only daughter, seeing the beautiful young lady she had become. They had last seen each other five months and Eleven was twenty, but Terry was sure she had grown more and more. There was a spark in her. Something different, more... mature.

Her little girl wasn’t little anymore. She hadn’t been for a while now.

Terry touched her daughter’s cheek and caressed it. Eleven smiled at her.

“You’re good, sweetie. You’re very good. And you’re right. We can catch up tomorrow.”

After saying good night to her mother, Eleven went to bed as well.

She grabbed her phone, aware she had left Mike with no answer, and typed down a quick reply.

He's just trying, I guess. But, if it gets too much, you should say something. At least, to your mother.

Mike didn't answer and Eleven fell asleep waiting for a message.

Around two in the morning, her phone buzzed so loud that it awakened her. Through her half-closed sleepy eyes, she grabbed it. Then, she blinked, confused, seeing Sean's name.

Sean

You're right. Rick and Morty is so awesome. Do you have any more suggestions?

Eleven stared at the message for a while, a silly, surprised smile twitched on her lips. It was always surprising to have these little moments with Sean, where he showed her that he actually listened to her and did act on her advices sometimes, even if those were just about what TV shows to watch. She didn't even remember exactly when she had told him to watch 'Rick and Morty', but she was happy he did.

Deciding to answer him in the morning, Eleven put her phone down on the night table and turned around, adjusting the sheets around her body.

July, 1st. Saturday. 15:31

The sun was burning their bodies. The sweat was making them

sticky. The lack of wind was making them thirsty. But the joint was letting them enjoy everything with no worries in the world.

"I want to go back to the water," Dustin said, staring at the clean water of the river, which laid just a few meters away from them. It looked so welcoming, so... fluffy.

"Dude, you just got back from there," Mike replied, rolling to his side, so he could face Eleven. He put the joint in between her lips.

"Yeah, but it's so hot out here," Dustin complained.

When silence was the only answer he got, Dustin looked behind his shoulders and saw his two best friends staring at each other as Eleven smoked a joint that Mike was holding for her. They were clearly unaware of anything going on around them. He rolled his eyes and stood up.

"I'm going back to the water."

Neither Mike nor Eleven heard him.

Mike brought the joint back to his lips and took a long drag as Eleven exhaled the smoke from her throat. They smiled at each other.

It was his eyes, Eleven suddenly realized. She liked his eyes too much. And his freckles. And those goddamn fleshy lips that she wanted to kiss all the time.

"You're staring at me," Mike said with a cocky smile. "Is it because I'm too pretty?"

Eleven's answer was a soundless nod.

Her confirmation that he was indeed pretty made Mike blink, surprised, and looked away for a second, his already red face burning up with bashfulness.

"You were not expecting that, were you now?" Eleven teased.

Mike shrugged and placed the joint back between her lips. Eleven took a long drag and he pulled back.

It was only after she exhaled the smoke at a very slow pace that Mike leaned down and kissed her with passion. Eleven's hand went directly to his hair and pulled him down, his body hovering over hers.

And it was good. Their lips knew one another. Their tongues had had that dance a thousand times before, tangling, battling, caressing each other.

It didn't matter that, out of blue, the temperatures rose higher, their bodies sweating even more, their breaths out of control too soon.

"The joint," Mike muttered against her lips.

They pulled back.

Mike raised his hand, showing her the half-smoked joint.

"We have to finish this first."

Eleven sighed.

"Fine."

Mike pulled away from her, sitting up on his towel. He looked over at Dustin's towel and noticed he wasn't there. He searched the river for a sign of his friend as he lighted the joint again. Finally, he saw Dustin socializing with a couple of girls almost on the other side of the river.

"I have a Would You Rather," Eleven stated.

Mike puffed out the joint's smoke, a smirk curling in his lips, and nodded approvingly.

"Cool. Tell me."

"Would you rather... have sex with your sister or get shot three times?"

Mike's eyebrows shot up on his forehead as his mouth hung open. Eleven snorted a big laugh, knowing she had got him good.

“Why do you do this to me?!” Mike demanded to know. “Like... What? Which sister?”

Eleven kept laughing, tears in her eyes.

“El!”

Eleven rolled over to her side, clutching to her torso as the laughs were making it hurt.

“But wait,” Mike said. Eleven tried to control her laugh and pay attention to him. “Do I get to pick the places I get shot?”

She gave it a thought.

“Sure.”

“Then, I would rather get shot three times.”

Eleven sat up abruptly and stared at him, shocked.

“What? Three times, Mike. It’s a bullet inside of you three times.”

Yeah, but at least I’m not inside- Ugh, I can’t even say it.”

Eleven shook her head, disappointed.

Mike freaked out, “Just because you have a weird crush on my older sister, El, doesn’t mean I have. She’s my sister.”

El rose an eyebrow.

“I don’t have a weird crush on Nancy.”

Mike gave her *are-you-kidding-me* kind of stare before he leaped back to his black backpack and grabbed his phone.

“What are you doing?”

“Calling Nancy.”

“Wait, what? No, don’t do that!”

Mike smirked at her.

“Mik-“

“Hey siiiis! El wants to talk to you!”

Mike threw his phone at Eleven and she grabbed it clumsily. She glared at him before raising the phone to her ear and talk to Nancy.

If Holly thought El was a role model for life, then El’s admiration for Nancy went miles and miles into far away galaxies and parallel universes (Mike’s words, not hers). She had decided to look up to Nancy the second she found out that the petit, blue-eyed girl who had been so nice to her on her first day in Hawkins High School was Mike’s older sister. Nancy, who was three years older than them, had been a senior when El first moved to Hawkins. When Eleven got lost in the school’s hallways on her first day, having no freaking clue where her Social Studies class was going to be, that senior girl with curly light brown hair, a sweet smile and worried eyes had been her salvation. The two met again weeks later, at the Wheeler’s house, and Eleven would never forget the words Nancy had said when she found her in the family’s living-room, watching ‘It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia’ with Mike: *Oh, Michael, you are way out of your league in this friendship.*

“Oh, you know, Mike’s the same... Yeah –“Eleven giggled –“A total loser.”

Offended, Mike said, “Oh that’s it,” and took his phone away from El and raised the phone to his ear, “Stop ruining my friendship with El, Nancy. Bye.”

He hung up, pretending to be angry, but left his phone nearby, knowing exactly how his older sister was. She was going to text him something rudely funny in a few minutes.

“She’s great,” Eleven said.

Mike rolled his eyes.

“Weird crush,” he reinforced.

“No, it’s not.”

“If I told you she came out to the family as a lesbian, what would you say?”

Eleven stopped still, staring at him.

“You’re not serious,” she realized.

Mike snorted and shook his head.

“Of course not. She’s still in that polygamic relationship with her high school boyfriend and a guy they met in college.”

Eleven seemed impressed.

“Does your dad know?”

“Yeah. Why do you think she isn’t here this year?” Mike remarked, checking his phone and seeing there was still no message from his sister. “He refused to accept it, so Nancy has shortened her vacation days back home. It’s sad. Holly misses her a lot.”

“Yeah, I know,” Eleven said. Mike raised an eyebrow. “She told me yesterday. That she missed Nancy. I didn’t know why she wasn’t here already. She always comes here around this time, doesn’t she?”

“Yeah. But not anymore. She might come for my birthday.” Mike’s birthday was in a month. “I’m working on it.”

Eleven nodded. Suddenly, she felt bad, flickering her eyes away from Mike, giving voice to her thoughts for a second. They asked her something she couldn’t quite answer; not without Mike’s input in it.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” She asked.

Mike shrugged.

“It happened like a month ago... Nancy came here to introduce Jonathan. There was a huge fight. I just... Mom called me crying. I didn’t feel like talking about it.” Mike looked at her, his eyes a transparent display of firm sobriety. “It’s not like you tell me

everything.”

Eleven felt deeply offended with that accusation.

“Yes, I do,” she replied.

Mike snorted, a bit cynical, and shook his head.

“Oh yeah? My mom told me your mother had a breakdown during Christmas last year. You never told me that.”

Eleven opened her mouth to retaliate, but nothing came out.

Terry Ives still suffered from the remains of what had been her marriage with Martin Brenner. She had fallen into a depression during the times of the divorce and, sometimes, sometimes she would crack and spend a few days in bed. Martin Brenner had sucked so much out of Terry that, some days, she felt hopeless, wondering why she had done that, why she had put her daughter and herself through a sad, lifeless marriage.

“It’s okay, El,” Mike comforted. “I just... No one can know everything about anyone, right?”

Eleven felt a sharp pain in her chest and she looked away from her best friend.

“But... I thought we did.”

“And we... do?” Mike frowned at his hesitation. “Well, I do.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Eleven asked. The high the joint had given her was suddenly gone. The pain she had just felt dissipated. She was now angry, upset that Mike was implying shit that wasn’t true.

“I know nothing about what’s going on with you and Sean, El,” Mike looked her in the eyes. “I tell you everything about Tina and me.”

“Everything? Really?”

“Well, yeah. I mean, I don’t tell you about us making out and-“

“Shut up,” Eleven spit out in anger.

Mike looked at her, agape.

“I just...” Eleven rubbed her eyes with the tips of her fingers, pushing tears away. What was she doing?

Gulping, Eleven looked at him, putting up a strong façade. “I’m sorry, okay? I’m... I’m quite discreet, Mike, when it comes to... matters of the heart?” She wasn’t sure if she had picked the right expression. “I mean, ... I don’t like to talk about it until I’m sure of what it is. Sean isn’t Tina. You had a crush on Tina for ages. Sean was a guy that... I got to make out once and, yeah, then I found out he’s funny and nice, so I’m giving it a shot. But it isn’t the same for me as it is with you and Tina, okay?”

Mike took his time to move his head up and down, understanding her. Eleven forced a small smile.

“Have you two been talking?” He asked.

Eleven bent her knees, pulling them closer to her body and then wrapping her arms around her legs.

“Yeah, sometimes. He takes my opinions in consideration, you know? A lot of guys don’t do that.”

Mike nodded again, thoughtful.

They tilted their heads, looking at the people in the river. Dustin was coming out of the water, running back to his towel, which was resting in front of Mike and Eleven’s. He had placed it there because he knew his two friends too well at this point of their friendship, and he knew that they would probably go into deep, cheesy staring contests, or even make out with each other, and he would rather not see that.

“Guys, those girls told me a new pizza place opened here in town. We have to go check it out!” Dustin threw himself onto his towel. He looked at his two best friends. “Can we go?”

Mike and Eleven shared a look.

“Yeah, sure.”

July, 12th. Wednesday. 22:55

Ceci had arrived today. She got introduced as a very good friend of Dustin to his parents since the boy was too scared to tell them the truth. At least, for now. And Ceci felt the same. Only Karen Wheeler knew they were actually dating and got very excited when she met the girl. But she had promised to keep quiet. Mike had talked to her, after Dustin had asked him nicely, and explained the situation.

“Well, you did let that cat out of the bag,” Eleven reminded him.

Mike rolled his eyes.

“Shut up.”

They had just left one of the top restaurants in town, Dustin still inside, waiting for Ceci, who had gone to the bathroom, and now had plans to go to some disco in a town nearby. Dustin was the designated driver, promising not to drink too much, but, first, they would go to Eleven’s house to drink for a bit. Her mother had a night shift and would only be coming home around seven am. As long as they kept everything clean and took the bottles out to the trash, they would be good.

The restaurant’s glassed door opened wide as Dustin and Ceci got out. They made their way to Dustin’s dad’s car (his mother’s car was better than his dad’s, so they never let him drive that one) and drove to Eleven’s place.

“It’s a nice house,” Ceci said as soon as they walked in and she took one long look at living-room. “It’s cosy. My parents bought this... huge flat a few years ago. It’s so big for the three of us.”

Eleven’s lips curled into a kind smile, feeling sympathetic with the girl’s situation. She had once lived in a big house, when her mother had been married to Brenner, and it had been terrible. It had taken her months to find her way around the place without getting lost.

“Where’s the booze?” Dustin asked.

“Upstairs,” Eleven said before climbing her way up the stairs to her bedroom, where she had a few bottles hidden inside her wardrobe. Meanwhile, Mike was getting ice and glasses from the kitchen.

They sat around the kitchen table, Ceci and Dustin having pulled their chairs so close it looked like they were sharing the same seat. Mike and Eleven took one look at them, then at each other before pulling the vodka bottle closer to them. Clearly, Ceci and Dustin would be more interested in making out than drinking.

They first started out with a round of shots. Mike mixed the drinks – vodka with lemon juice – putting more alcohol into their cups than juice. It had a burning, awful taste when it went down their throats.

“We need music!” Dustin exclaimed after leaving a kiss on his girlfriend’s lips.

Mike agreed and, raising a finger asking them to wait for a second, he got up and went upstairs, to Eleven’s room. She knew exactly what he was going to get: her portable, roundish speaker.

When he came back, he connected the speaker to his cell phone, assuring that way his position as the temporary DJ of the night. Kings of Leon’s song, *Use Somebody*, started blasting on the speaker as Mike looked around the table, smirking at his friends and Dustin’s girlfriend. Eleven rolled her eyes at him.

They started drinking casually, talking about random topics (at a certain point, they talked about how awful high school bathrooms were), and Dustin and Ceci did interrupt many talks to make out with each other, leaving Mike and Eleven free to refill their glasses without them noticing.

“You guy! You know what we can play?” Ceci suddenly said, her glass waving around as she moved her hand. Dustin had an arm wrapped around her shoulder and was beaming in happiness as he stared at her. “The Best Friends Game.”

“The what now?” Mike asked, confused. He looked at Eleven, who

was taking a long sip of her drink, not feeling the awful taste of the cheap vodka anymore, but she shrugged, not knowing the answer either.

“The Best Friends –“ Ceci giggled –“Game! It’s like... there’s a paper for each team, alright? I ask, for example, Eleven a question about Mike and she has to write it down. If theirs answers –“She giggled again and this time looked at Dustin affectionally –“their answers match, they get a point. Each time a team loses a round, they have to take a shot.”

“Oh, Ceci,” Dustin sighed, resting both his arms on top of the table. “We’re going to lose.”

Ceci frowned, her mouth falling open in complete offense.

“No, we’re not.”

Dustin snorted, already defeated.

“You’ll see.”

Happy and drunk, Eleven volunteered to go to her bedroom to grab some papers and pens. Mike volunteered to keep her company and, halfway through their way there and back they found the time to make out against the wall, Mike’s hand playing sneaky games under Eleven’s blouse.

Eleven moaned against his lips, one hand grabbing his hair and the other holding two pieces of blank papers and the pens. Mike’s hand was teasingly making its way between her legs, his fingers pressing against her soft core over her jeans.

“GUYS, COME ON!” Dustin’s voice echoed from downstairs.

They pulled back, breaths uncontrollable, chests heaving and their lips red and bruised.

“Later?” Mike asked, touching Eleven’s cheek with the back of his hand.

She nodded.

“Later.”

Dustin’s glare burned them as soon as they walked in the kitchen. Eleven passed one piece of paper and one pen to Ceci and the girl happily decided to begin the game by asking Eleven what Mike’s biggest fear was.

After snorting, she wrote down her answer: *crying in public*.

“So, Mike, what is your biggest fear?” Ceci asked.

Mike took a sip from his drink before answering, “Crying in public.”

Eleven showed her answer to Ceci and Dustin as she leaned against Mike’s shoulder, grinning.

“Okay, now it’s Mike turn to ask Dustin something about me,” Ceci said, giving her boyfriend a competitive look.

Dustin sighed and grabbed the piece of paper and pen.

“Oh boy.”

“Well, Dustin, what is Ceci’s... favourite piece of clothing?”

Dustin, thankfully, got that one right.

The game kept on going, full of laughs and surprises, with silly questions being asked about favourite animals, TV shows, films, and even colours (something that got Mike into a five-minute speech since he thought it was bullshit that people had a favourite colour). Eleven and Mike scored right each time (like, of course, Mike knew Eleven’s favourite book was 1984 by George Orwell, even though she re-read more times Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Eleven knew that the Pirates of Caribbean movies were awesome enough to get into Mike’s top 5 favourite movies of all times, but the saga clearly should have ended the moment Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley left the cast), unlike Ceci and Dustin who had to drink a few times, something that got the girl pissed and more competitive since the two of them were the *dating couple*. Yes, they were only dating for a few months, but they knew a lot about each other. She had made sure of that before accepting to date Dustin.

“Man, I still have to drive to the disco,” Dustin complained, taking another sip of his almost finished drink.

“You can do it, man,” Mike winked at him, trying to give him some support, but his head rolled back on his neck and he ended up smiling at Eleven affectionately. She leaned closer to him, laying a hand over his thigh. Mike rested his hand over hers.

“It’s Mike’s turn to write something,” Ceci announced, motioning with her eyes to the scrabbled paper in front of Mike.

Mike sighed before he leaned over the table as he grabbed the paper and the pen, getting ready to write. He looked over at his friend’s girlfriend, waiting for her question.

Ceci puckered her lips out in a very funny way as she tried to come up with something that Mike couldn’t possibly know about his friend. There was a limit, right? What was the limit when it came to Mike Wheeler’s knowledge about Eleven?

Suddenly, a sly smirk curled up in her lips.

“Okay, Mike, sex.”

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“Sex?”

Ceci nodded, still smirking.

“Which is Eleven’s favourite sex position?”

Mike stared at the girl, his mouth half-opened.

Ceci leaned back on her chair, feeling very confident, almost smug. That was, until Mike cackled loud, his entire body shaking with the laugh. A bit of his drink split over the table.

Eleven was staring at them quietly, yet with a full desire to start laughing as well. Dustin’s face went red as he realized he had kept Mike and Eleven’s friends-with-benefits relationship from his girlfriend. It hadn’t been on purpose, really. He just always assumed

people knew about it.

“Why are you laughing?” Ceci asked.

Mike asked for a second as he tried to get his shit together. Next to him, Eleven was waiting for his answer with a very amused smile on her lips.

“It’s- Okay!” Mike took a deep breath. He looked over at Ceci. “El’s favourite sex position? Well, it really depends on her mood, but I’m pretty sure her favourite position is when - “Mike put one of his hands over the other –“she’s on top. She likes to take control. And, hey, I’m not complaining. I like it when she does.”

Ceci blinked, her eyes turning to Eleven, who just nodded approvingly of her best friend’s answer. They high-fived each other.

“But... That’s... But-“ Ceci looked at Dustin. “He likes it?”

Dustin nodded.

“Yeah...”

“What, Dustin never told you?” Eleven snorted, half of her face hidden behind her half-full glass of vodka with lemon juice. She was way too drunk to keep herself under control.

“Yeah, sometimes we fuck,” Mike said, nodding very solemnly. “But it’s no biggie. Right, El?”

Eleven giggled and nodded.

“Yeah, no biggie.”

It didn’t matter that a small part of her wanted to suddenly start a fight with Mike, asking him about Tina and them. *Are you going to ask her to be your girlfriend? Are we going to stop sleeping with each other? Can we do it, Mike? Can we only be friends?*

Ceci’s entire body froze as she stared at the two of them, her mouth wide opened in shock and her eyes so big they looked like they were going to pop out from her face. Dustin tried to soothe her back,

calling her name a few times, but his girlfriend was unresponsive.

“Oh God, did we break her?” Eleven asked, taking one long sip from her drink, almost finishing it. Her vision was dizzy, her body was lighter and she felt like making out with Mike a lot. But she knew she had to wait until they were in a dancefloor.

“Maybe we did,” Mike snorted.

Ceci shook out of her shock with a sudden all-body tremble. She grabbed her glass and drunk it until it was empty. Then, she stated, “I don’t get why it surprises me so much. I should have seen it coming.”

The other three agreed with her. She really should have seen it coming.

Abruptly, Ceci hit Dustin’s arm. He yelped, surprised.

“What was that for?” He asked, rubbing his arm.

“You could have told me that!” She shouted, motioning with her hand to Mike and Eleven. “That your two friends were banging each other.”

“Everyone knows it!” Dustin exclaimed back.

“Well, not everyone, because I didn’t!”

“And Sean and Tina don’t either,” Eleven decided to add.

Ceci looked at her, confused.

“Who are Sean and Tina?”

Eleven looked over at Mike, waiting for *him* to answer that.

Mike snorted.

“Sean is Eleven’s soon to be boyfriend.”

It was Mike’s turn to get a slap on his arm. He laughed.

“He is not!” Eleven cleared that up, looking at Ceci. If she wanted to

make out with Mike tonight, she couldn't have Dustin's girlfriend thinking she had something serious with another guy. "He is just a good friend."

"Oh, okay." Ceci didn't seem she wanted to push that topic anymore. She looked at her cell phone's screen, unblocking it so that she could check the hours. "Should we leave?"

"Yeah," Dustin said, standing up very quickly. "I swear to God if I get stopped by the police, you three pay the fine."

It was almost two am when they got to the bar. Ceci worried for a second that they would have to show their IDs, but Dustin assured her that the bouncer would let them in with no problem. He knew them from their days in high school, being two years older than them, so it was all cool. All they had to do was not drink inside and keep a low profile.

As soon as they walked in, Eleven's body started moving according to the music's beat, one hand pulling Mike close behind her as she made her way to the dance floor. She saw Ceci and Dustin somewhere near them, but she decided to focus on Mike, wrapping her arms around his waist and pulling their bodies close, their pelvis touching. Mike's deep brown eyes were almost black as his pupils dilated, staring at Eleven as she danced against him.

He bit his bottom lip, his dizzy mind making up plans for Eleven and their night. She had put on a light pink blouse, and as she moved her arms in the air, feeling the song's tune, the blouse raised and her skin was naked for his eyes to look at. Her lips looked redder than the usual, puffier as he felt the urge to kiss her. *Slow*, a voice in his head warned him. *Take it slow*.

Both of Mike's hands touched Eleven's arms, caressing them gently, and then he moved them down, going to her back, his fingers teasing her spine until he found the back of her jeans. He inserted his hands inside her jeans' back pockets and pulled her against him. Eleven smirked at him.

The song changed. Suddenly, *The Hills* by The Weekend started playing. Couples started grinding against each other, and Mike and

Eleven were no exception to the rule despite the fact they weren't actually a couple.

Mike's lips were hovering dangerously close to Eleven's mouth. Her eye followed them with devotion, drowning in how good they were – Mike's lips were a Devil's temptation -, trying to find the right moment to close the distance between them.

Soon, right in the climax of the song's chorus, Mike crushed his lips against Eleven's, almost pulling her in the air. She giggled against his mouth, pulling away for a second to blow a strand of hair that had fallen between their lips, and then kissed him again, her fingers digging into his neck to keep him close to her.

Their bodies were buzzing with electricity, the song a long time forgotten. They were moving their bodies according to their own rhythm; their lips guiding them into a complete oblivious state of desire. Mike's hands were everywhere, trying to feel every corner of her body.

Another song came and went. Their lips never parted one another. Their eyes barely opened to look at what was happening. Their hands had a life of their own, looking for a new place on each other's body to touch and caress.

Suddenly, someone bumped into them. Mike pulled back and looked behind him.

There was this guy holding hands up, apologizing.

Mike made a face.

"Dude, I was making out with her –" He pointed at Eleven, who was trying to grab Mike's arms and attention to her again – "She's, like, the most gorgeous girl in the world, dude. I was making out with her and you interrupted us." Mike seemed really sad in his drunk daze.

Eleven smiled up at him as the other guy apologized again, saying it had been an accident.

"But dude..." Mike was going once again to start his speech.

“Mike,” Eleven called, raising a hand to his cheek and making him look at her. “He has apologized. We can have fun again, yeah?”

“I just want to kiss you,” Mike muttered, leaning in, their foreheads touching. “All night, El. I want to kiss you all night.”

Eleven nodded, biting her bottom lip. “You can do that.”

“I can,” Mike muttered and leaned in, his lips finding hers against. But this time he took it slow, his mouth moving careful and gently against hers, his hands caressing each of her cheekbones.

It was all good.

It was just the two of them. No one else.

For all the night, that was all Mike and Eleven did: kiss each other mindlessly while dancing. Sometimes, they would pause it to hang out with Ceci and Dustin, which was cool, but the couple didn’t actually mind having some privacy – if you could call it that when they were in the middle of a dance floor surrounded by strangers – to be with each other while Mike and Eleven went on their drunk making-out session like there was no tomorrow.

“Are they always like that?” Ceci asked Dustin at a certain point of the night.

Dustin, who was feeling sober after spending almost two hours in the dance floor sweating and kissing his girlfriend, shrugged and said, “When they are sober, they are more careful.”

“Do they like each other?” Ceci asked, looking at Mike and Eleven, who were now slow dancing with each other even though Jennifer Lopez’s *Jenny in the Block* was playing, gazing into each other’s eyes and murmuring something that no one else could understand. “They look like they like each other.”

Dustin sighed.

“It’s complicated.”

“How come?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

A few meters away from them, Mike and Eleven were teasing each other with their hands. While Eleven was caressing Mike’s upper arms with the tip of her fingers, the boy had his hands under her blouse, resting on her back all spread out. The heat that they emitted was comfortable, it made Eleven feel safer.

“We could watch a movie,” Mike suggested, his lips barely touching hers.

Eleven’s hands circled his arms, squeezing them.

“Or we could watch a marathon of Rick and Morty,” she replied.

Mike snorted and left a small kiss on her lips.

“We’ll fall asleep,” he remarked.

“We’ll fall asleep no matter what we choose to see,” El pointed out as Mike’s lips moved to her neck, leaving feather-touch kisses on her skin. She already had a few red marks over her neck. Of course, it was nothing compared to the hickey Eleven had gave him right above his collarbone during a Beyoncé song.

Instead of answering him, Eleven grabbed Mike by his blue shirt, which made him look amazing, and pulled him in for another kiss.

Maybe, just maybe, someday she would admit that, yeah, she was a bit insatiable when it came to Mike Wheeler.

Giving him up would, without a doubt, be the hardest thing she would ever do.

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments will make my day.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, everyone.

Here's a new chapter.

I would like to say something before going into this chapter:

There was a joke made in the first chapter, something Mike said to Eleven about her not getting herpes on her date with Sean. I did not mean to hurt anyone with it, or insinuate something. That joke was used as a way for you guys to understand that Mike was feeling jealous of Eleven's date. If I hurt anyone with it, I'm sorry. Truly.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize. I proof-read it, but I'm tired because I woke up early today, so I'm not sure if I caught all the mistakes.

July, 24th. Monday. 15:54

“My sister is coming for my birthday.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, and she’s bringing *both* her boyfriends. Imagine how great family dinners are going to be like for a few days.”

Eleven chuckled.

“That’s the Nancy I love.”

Mike snorted.

They were currently laying on Mike’s king-sized bed, Eleven’s head resting on her best friend’s stomach as he played around with her curly, brown hair, trying to find split ends to cut them with an old

school red scissors he had had somewhere in his desk's drawers. Eleven was reading a magazine she had found in her living-room, probably something her mother had bought a few weeks ago, and was very intrigued about all this drama going on between two celebrities whose names she had not known until she found that particular article.

Summer was going by fast. The last few weeks had been spent with Dustin and Ceci, and Eleven found herself getting closer to the other girl. Ceci was a fun person to be around, with a sense of humour popping up in the most random moments you could possibly imagine. Somehow, she reminded Eleven of Max, which, deep down, made sense, since Dustin had had a thing with her and was now dating Ceci. He clearly had a type.

"What do you want for your birthday?" Eleven asked after a while. Mike's birthday would be in six days and she had yet found something to give him without getting a hint from the birthday boy himself.

"Sex is fine by me."

Eleven hit whatever Mike's body part she managed to get and he laughed.

"Seriously, Mike."

"I am serious," the boy replied as he cut a tiny split end of her hair.

"I'm not Tina," Eleven teased, trying to do it in a light tone, yet, inside, wanting desperately to know Mike's reaction to it.

Mike, being Mike, snorted and dug one hand into her curly hair, his fingers finding her scalp and massaging it.

"Tina isn't giving me that."

"Yet."

Eleven knew she was pushing it. But she couldn't help it. Not when she had been putting up with Mike's non-stopping message chain with Tina, or their random phone calls, or the fact that they sent

images of whatever they were doing to each other. Not when she kept trying to do the same with Sean just because she felt jealous of Tina.

Mike sighed.

“Yeah, yet,” he agreed.

And that crushed Eleven’s heart secretly.

Why did she do this to herself? Why did she put herself into a position where she knew her heart would suffer?

He is your best friend, Eleven. You should be happy he has found someone.

Mike suddenly moved and Eleven’s head hit the bed. She complained, taking one hand to her head as if it had hurt. Mike chuckled softly at her reaction. Her eyes followed his figure as he changed positions, lying next to her. Actually, half of his body was practically on top of hers. Eleven rested a hand on his arm, her fingers going under his t-shirt’s short sleeve. He was warm. He was always warm.

They leaned in at the same time, their lips finding each other in a passionate and frenetic kiss. Eleven’s right hand moved to Mike’s hair, where it always ended up going, as her other hand went under his t-shirt, feeling the warmth of his back. She dug her fingers into his skin and he moaned in return. Her legs widened up as Mike’s body slid all its way over her body, one of his hands moving from its place near her head to her jeans shorts. His fingers played around with the button of the shorts for a while until he finally unbuttoned them.

Eleven moaned, gripping her hand tightly around Mike’s hair, refusing to let go of his lips, as his hand slipped under her underwear, his fingers finding her wet core, provoking a full-body tremble on her. He already knew what to do and how to do it.

Mike was careful, rubbing his thumb against her clit while his other fingers teased her entrance.

Eleven kept moaning, her pleased sounds being muffled by Mike’s

lips on hers.

The fire inside her, the need to get there, to feel pleased and satisfied, was burning up, and Eleven could almost feel it.

She was almost-

Mike's phone starting ringing, blasting out a weird polyphonic ringtone. He pulled back, surprised, and Eleven whined.

"No, stay," she asked in a tiny voice.

But Mike moved away and went to grab his phone, on his night table.

"Oh shit, it's Tina!"

Mike stood up in a quick jump, picked up the call and left the room to talk to the girl.

Eleven stayed in the same position, her face all red, her shorts opened and a terrible, frustrating need between her legs that wanted to be satisfied. Mike... Mike had left her when she was almost reaching her orgasm.

He left to talk to Tina.

Eleven buttoned up her shorts and sat up, feeling frustrated. And angry. This shouldn't be happening. She wouldn't let this happen again. Mike wanted Tina. Mike wanted Tina so bad he left Eleven hanging, on the edge of her release, so he could take *a fucking call* from that girl.

No more.

No. fucking. more.

Cursing a dozen bad words under her breath, Eleven grabbed her phone and purse and was about to leave Mike's room when he walked in, bumping into her.

"Wow, where are you going?"

Eleven just glared at him before pushing him away and leaving the room. She climbed down the stairs fast, shouted a quick, nice goodbye at Mrs. Wheeler before leaving, almost running from there.

She couldn't do it.

Either Mike wanted this or he wanted Tina. He couldn't have both.

And Eleven felt tired. So tired of... being happy with Mike, of keeping up whatever they had going, until those sad, heart-breaking moments in which he said Tina's name came up. Because she was there. Every day. In the tip of his tongue.

God, she felt dirty. Almost like Tina was this naïve little girlfriend whose boyfriend was a douchebag and Eleven was this asshole girl who was hooking up with the boyfriend. But they weren't that.

Was it wrong what they kept doing? Should they have ended it a long time ago? Maybe. Maybe, they should have done it right after Mike started going on dates with Tina and Eleven started seeing Sean. They were hurting two people who, if they knew the truth, would hate them.

Eleven felt her phone buzz inside her shorts' pocket. She took it out, anger burning up inside her since she practically knew it was Mike calling her, trying to understand why she was angry (but, come on, why wouldn't she be?), yet she was wrong. So wrong.

Eleven stopped still in the middle of the sidewalk. It was Sean.

"Hey El."

"Sean," she said, surprised. "Shouldn't you be sleeping?"

"Oh, yeah... But I had to take my mom somewhere, so I had to wake up super early. Now she's standing in front of the supermarket talking to a friend and I'm here, slowly dying away, so I thought, you know –" His voice started going nervous – "I thought I could call you?"

Eleven smiled, something that surprised her even more.

“That’s cool. How long have you standing there?”

“Like, forty minutes. Not even joking.”

Eleven started walking, a laugh leaving her throat.

“That long?!”

“Yeah. My mom is crazy, man. If she recognizes anyone in a public place, she will talk to them and make sure that she has all info about their lives,” Sean complained, but there was a hint of amusement in his voice.

Eleven chuckled.

“Well, she’s a friendly person, I’m sure.”

“Yeah, maybe someday you guys can meet,” Sean said.

Eleven’s lips twitched in a kind of sympathetic smile.

“Yeah, maybe someday,” she agreed.

Because Sean was nice. The nicest, really. And he did try and keep in touch with her. He respected her when she told him she wasn’t in the mood to talk. He waited for her to initiate conversations instead of suffocating her with his messages. He was a real gentleman. And they had fun. He was funny, like, maybe, Tina was funny to Mike.

Maybe she could learn how to fall in love with Sean.

When she got home, after spending the last ten minutes of her walk talking on the phone with Sean, she hung up, promising him to call later – and she would -, and was met with the smell of something sweet in the air. Chocolate.

Smiling, Eleven went to the kitchen, where she found her mother taking a baked chocolate cake out of its tin.

“Hey, Mama,” she greeted, approaching the older woman and kissing her cheek. “Baking?”

“Yes. It’s Jenny’s birthday today and the other nurses asked me to bake a birthday cake.” She smiled at her daughter. Then, a sudden thought came to her mind. “Oh, Karen also asked for my help for Mike’s birthday cake. It’s in a few days, isn’t it?”

Eleven nodded, clenching her chin and keeping the anger bubbling quietly inside her. Her mother didn’t have to know that she was pissed at Mike. And she couldn’t. Oh no, Terry Ives loved Mike as if he were her own son. If she found out the two were having a fight (were they?), then she would probably try and make peace between the two of them even though she had nothing to do with it. Either way, she couldn’t possibly know why they were fighting.

Was it a fight?

Eleven’s phone buzzed. Looking down at her left hand, she read Mike’s name on her phone screen. He was calling her. She decided to ignore it and looked back at her mother.

“When is your next day off, Mama?”

“Ah, in two days?”

“Cool. Spend the day together?” Eleven asked with a childlike smile and a tilted head.

Terry laughed at her daughter and pinched her cheekbone.

“Yes, of course, dear.”

Nodding with a big smile on her face, Eleven stepped away, giving her mother room to keep working on the birthday cake for her co-worker.

“I’m going to facetime with Max now.”

“Have fun,” her mother wished with a knowing smile. Every time Eleven facetimed with her friend Max, laughs echoed throughout the house.

Eleven closed her bedroom’s door and went directly to her desk, where her laptop was resting. Putting down her phone, she opened

her laptop, waited patiently for it to start running and then called Max. For a few seconds, only her face could be seen in the right corner of the laptop, Eleven with her curly brown hair, her big eyes and tanned face. Then, Max's red hair showed up.

"Hellooooo!" Max greeted with a big smile.

Eleven leaned closed to her webcam and pouted.

"Max, I miss you too much."

The other girl snorted and rolled her eyes.

"You're impossible. Tell me some juicy news or I'll hang up on you."

"You wouldn't!"

Max's eyes brightened up with the challenge. Eleven sighed.

"I have nothing new to tell. Dustin's girlfriend is still here. Mike's birthday is in a few days. I've been talking with Sean."

"Wait, what? You have?" Max frowned. Eleven suddenly realized she had never shared that piece of information with her best friend since Summer began. "Since when?"

"Since I went on that first date with him in May?" Eleven replied, trying to act out innocent despite knowing exactly what kind of information her friend wanted.

"And why am I only hearing this now? I mean, ... Summer began two months ago."

Eleven sighed. In the corner of her eye, she saw her scrapbook laying on the desk and remembered that she had picked it up yesterday and glued in some latest photos of her, Mike and Dustin. There was even one with Ceci.

"El?"

Eleven looked at her computer screen. Max was waiting for an answer with her mouth pursed.

"I like him," Eleven said.

Realization came to her as she found herself telling the truth while saying those words. She indeed liked Sean.

"More than you like whatever you have going on with Mike?"

"Maybe," Eleven replied honestly. If she were to say yes or no, she would be lying in both cases.

"Wow, El!"

Eleven blushed, eyes flickering away, meeting the scrapbook again, before she decided to change the topic.

"What about you? How's life?"

Max sighed.

"Well, Lucas came to meet my parents."

"Really? Wow."

"Yeah. They liked him a lot, made him feel at home and all that..."
Max licked her lips, looking down for a second.

"But?" Eleven sensed. Max was that kind of person that needed a push when she needed to talk to someone.

Max looked away for a moment. In the back, Eleven could see one of her friend's bedroom's walls covered in pictures and her bed, which had a green blanket at its end.

"I met up with Billy."

Billy was Max's older brother who had refused to become her legal tutor years ago and instead let her fall into the sad, awful system that was the life of an orphan who was too old to be adopted. Sometimes they would meet because, well, he was the only blood-related family she still had, and Max couldn't help but feel connected to him.

"How did it go?"

"I introduced him to Lucas..." Max sighed. "Turns out my brother is a racist."

"Oh Max..." Eleven muttered.

"Should have known, right?" Max replied with a shrug, trying to act like she didn't care. But she did. "He is a homophobic too. Lucas made a comment about his friend Will and the boy he was seeing, and Billy made this... face... like he was full of hate, you know? Like Lucas had just said his friend had murdered three hundred children."

Eleven looked at her friend with no possible comforting words to say. Max had some confusing feelings about her older brother, wanting him to be in her life, yet hating him for every little thing he did.

"Are you and Lucas okay, though?" She ended up asking.

Max nodded.

"Yeah. I apologized for my brother, but Lucas said it was fine. I wasn't the asshole there, he was."

Eleven opened her mouth to reply when her phone started buzzing. Mike was calling her again.

Max must have heard the buzzing, her head tilted as if she could possibly see the phone from the other side of the webcam. "Who is it?"

Eleven ignored the phone call.

"Mike."

"Everything's okay?"

"Yeah."

Max stared at her best friend.

"El, you're terrible liar."

Eleven's lips curled into a small smile.

“Yeah, but we’re talking about you now, not Mike, so... Tell me good news.”

Max hesitated, checking in Eleven’s appearance, before she started rambling about the trip she took with her dad and mom (it made Eleven so happy to hear Max calling her foster parents that), how she hung out with some friends from high school and how she and Lucas were doing great, despite the small incident they had already talked.

Throughout their one-hour chat, Mike called three times. Eleven ignored them all and Max didn’t ask again about it.

July, 29th. Saturday. 14:33

Eleven had successfully ignored Mike for five days now. She still managed to hang out with Dustin and Ceci, but she made sure Mike wasn’t around. Dustin didn’t ask what was going on, but he knew they weren’t okay. He knew because whenever he told Eleven that yeah, Mike would be there too, she refused to meet them.

Mike tried to come to her house four days ago, but she simply ignored the knocks on the door, sending him a text message instead which said *Just fuck off for a while, Michael*. Was it rude of her? Yeah, maybe. Was she overreacting? Well... Maybe. But she felt *so angry*.

Why did he keep kissing her? Why did *she* keep kissing him? What were they doing at this point of their lives?

Eleven had just hung up from a phone call with Sean. Sean, who had been like a lifesaver these past few days, always talking to her, making sure she was laughing and in a good mood (even though he had no idea she was spending her days feeling like shit and angry). It was nice. And she told Max about it. She told Dustin about it, surprising the boy with the fact she was still talking to Sean. She wanted to tell Mike about it because she wanted to rub it in his face that she liked someone as much as he liked Tina.

Was it ridiculous? Well, yeah. But *she* on her own was more ridiculous than the entire situation.

“Where’s Ceci?” Eleven asked after she opened her home’s door, revealing a lone Dustin.

“Went out shopping with my mom,” Dustin replied, entering the house.

Eleven closed the door and made a surprised face.

He shook his head as they made their way up to her bedroom. “My mom told me yesterday that Ceci would be a nice girlfriend for me.”

“Your mom wants you to date your girlfriend? What a shock,” Eleven said in a sarcastic tone.

“Well, she doesn’t know Ceci is my girlfriend,” Dustin reminded her as they walked in her bedroom. To Mr. and Mrs. Henderson, Ceci was still just a good friend of Dustin who he had met in college and had wanted to visit Hawkins during this summer.

“Yet.”

“Yet,” Dustin agreed, throwing himself onto Eleven’s bed. “She will know, though. In a few months. If Ceci and I are still together.”

Eleven, who was picking her laptop up so she could bring it to her bed, where she and Dustin would be watching a documentary about food industries, stopped still, confused.

“If?”

Dustin shrugged.

“Yeah.”

“You don’t think you guys will last?” Eleven asked, sitting next to the boy.

“Well, I hope we do, but... we can’t take anything for granted, El. Like, you don’t know what will happen tomorrow,” Dustin explained with a very solemn expression.

Eleven nodded, understanding.

She hadn't known that the day she would accept Sean's invitation for a date it would be the day that would change everything. She hadn't known that, after two long years, Tina would finally notice Mike. Things changed. People changed with them.

Life changed so fast that, sometimes, we didn't see it. One minute, you're kissing someone you like dearly, the other... you are fighting with them. You are hating them. They are moving on.

"How did you know?" Eleven suddenly asked. "That you wanted to date Ceci."

Dustin blinked, looking at Eleven with surprise in his eyes.

"Well... I... Well..." Dustin sat up straighter and tangled his hands together on his lap. "Well, we had known each other for a while. Like, we saw each other on campus, hung out at the same parties and all... We became kind of friends? Not like we were friends-friends, but... Friends who could study together when there was no one else to do it, or went out for a coffee because you both needed it, you know?"

Eleven nodded, understanding him.

"Well, one day... I asked her if she wanted to grab a coffee later, after classes, and she turned to me and asked... if it was a date. I hadn't thought about it until that moment. But my answer was yes, it was a date. And I realized then that I liked Ceci. I liked her a lot." Dustin licked his lips slowly. "I wanted to take it slow because I was scared, you know? Scared that it wouldn't work out, that we weren't thinking straight about it..."

"But it's going well."

Dustin smiled. Eleven couldn't help but smile back.

"It's going *fantastic*. I mean, she is shopping with my mom right now."

They shared a chuckle. Eleven moved her body, making herself more comfortable in her bed, and opened the laptop. She had already downloaded the documentary.

She was about to click on it when Dustin talked again.

“Are you and Mike okay?”

Eleven looked at Dustin. Sweet Dustin.

“Well, yeah.”

“You guys haven’t hung out together in the last days. You refused to see him, El.”

Eleven remained quiet.

“Listen,” Dustin began, “I’m not asking for the reason of your fight. I’m just asking if it is real.”

After a bit, Eleven nodded, confessing that, yeah, it was real.

Dustin sighed.

“I hope you guys make up before his birthday,” he said, leaning forwards and clicking on the movie’s icon to open it. A dramatic melody echoed from the laptop’s speakers.

Eleven froze, her eyes not focusing on anything around her. Next to her, Dustin moved around a bit, finding a better position to sit.

Shit. Mike’s birthday was tomorrow.

In all the years they had known each other, they never missed each other’s birthday. There had never been a fight around those times of the year. Tomorrow would be an exception.

Should she text him? Say something?

But what? How could she explain to Mike her reasons for being pissed at him? Would they make sense? No. *No*. She couldn’t tell him why she had been angry. He would think she felt something for him; something she did not feel.

It was just her fear of change. She had felt it when her mother first married Brenner and they moved into that big house of his. She had

felt it when the divorce papers came through and they moved to Hawkins. When she and Mike became close friends. When she met Dustin. Every time it looked like something in her life was going to change, she got scared.

Because you never knew what that change would bring. What if it was something bad? What if it hurt you?

“Dude, we eat so much sugar!” Dustin commented halfway through the documentary, his mouth hanging open in utter shock.

Eleven nodded slowly.

“Yup, we do...”

Dustin’s phone buzzed and he took it out of his jeans’ front pocket. The smile that curled up on his lips gave away who the message was from.

“Is Ceci home already?”

“Nah. But my mom is trying to hook us up,” Dustin snorted. “She told Ceci she would be amazing for me and that I was a very sweet boy.”

Eleven laughed.

“You are a sweet boy, Dustin Henderson.”

“Thanks, El. One of us has to be, right?”

Eleven hit his arm playfully.

“I’m very sweet, Dustin.”

“When you’re not being an asshole.” Dustin frowned his lips, thoughtful. “Well, I guess you are only an asshole when you are with Mike. You two can be insufferable.”

Eleven’s hand shot up to her heart as she faked offense. Dustin rolled his eyes at her.

“You know I’m right.”

Eleven went quiet, her attention returning to the documentary in front of them. Yeah, he was right. She and Mike could be two pains in the ass of whoever had to put up with them, especially in high school. Oh, how they drove some of the teachers crazy! That thought made her smile stupidly.

They had their fun. They were great friends, Mike and her. Great partners in crime.

For a moment there, almost at the end of the documentary, Eleven grabbed her phone and almost texted him.

But what was she going to say? I'm sorry I was a douchebag? I'm sorry I'm too scared of change? I'm sorry I like our sex-buddies' agreement too much?

She put the phone away again, being dragged into the documentary's plot by Dustin, who asked about something she had no idea how to answer. If she were completely honest, she had missed half of the facts in the film.

It was almost five pm when Dustin left, having received a text from Ceci telling she was on her way home with his mother. Parting with a bear-hug, Eleven watched Dustin walked out of her house propriety and down the street. He had walked there, living thirty minutes away from her place, since both his parents' cars had been occupied that afternoon.

Closing the door, Eleven decided to facetime Max. She sent her a quick text, warning her that in five minutes she would be calling her through the webcam. Then, she sent a message to Sean, a random one, talking about the documentary she had just seen. Sean would be delighted to see her take initiative and she would be happy because Sean could make her feel like that.

"So, what's up?", were Max' first words. Her red hair was caught in a well-made spine braid today.

"Great hair."

"Thanks."

“Well,” Eleven started, feeling shy. “I... Can you remind me... of... How did the conversation between you and Dustin went when you two decided to break things off?”

Max’s eyebrow arched up in a silent question. Never had Eleven asked her about the time she and Dustin broke it off. Back then, Max had said she didn’t want to talk about it and her friend had respected her.

Now, something had changed.

Eleven pressed her lips together in a nervous smile.

Max gave in and shrugged before she said, “We had sex and then agreed we shouldn’t do it anymore. What would be the point of keeping it up when we wanted something more serious and, with each other, we wouldn’t have that?” She eyed Eleven curiously. “Why? Thinking about doing the same?”

Eleven reacted with her entire body, blinking too many times in a row. “Huh? Oh, what? No? I mean, Mike and I are fine. I... We won’t have to do the same. We won’t have to talk once we get into relationships. I mean, it will be obvious then, right?”

Max just kept staring at her.

“What?” Eleven shrieked. “I mean it. I’m not going to just go up to him and say ‘hey, this is over’. We never actually talked about it in the first place, okay? We just let it happen. For three years, we just let it happen. How weird would it look like if I said I wanted to talk to him about it? I mean, if the conversation goes in that direction, fine, we will talk about it. We will say it’s over and- “ Eleven puffed, glaring at Max through the webcam –“You know what? I don’t even have to excuse myself, Max. *I don’t*. In fact, I’m going to hang up and bake a cake for Mike because it’s his birthday tomorrow!”

She went quiet, her chest heaving, her nervousness, which had been tickling her under her skin, suddenly swimming away, turning into a calm, apathetic attitude. It was then that Eleven realized that not once had Max talked since she began her rant.

“So, you’re going to bake a cake now?” Max asked, trying to pretend she had not heard her best friend freaking out over something that was clearly upsetting her, but she obviously didn’t want to talk about.

“Yeah. I am.”

“Good for you.”

They hung up after staring at each other in silence for a few seconds.

Eleven did go bake a chocolate cake in order to spend the time. To think less. To get distracted by something. Baking helped her mother to relax, that was why she did it. Maybe it could help her too.

She turned on the small radio her mother had over the fridge and let herself enjoy the music as she gathered all the ingredients to bake that cake. The cake for Mike.

Was it really for him? Would she give it to him as a birthday gift, or as a I’m-sorry gift?

She didn’t quite get what was going through her mind. What was she trying to accomplish? Should she text Mike? Should she only do it tomorrow, wishing him only a happy birthday and not justifying the last few days? But how shitty would that be? They were best friends.

Eleven started humming along some of the lyrics from Julie Michaels’ *Issues* song, as she mixed the melted chocolate with the batter made of eggs, sugar and flour.

‘Cause we got the kind of love it takes to solve them...

Did they ever say they loved each other? Even just as friends? Probably drunk. Yeah, most definitely drunk.

You do shit on purpose...

Eleven licked a bit of batter from her thumb, thinking of that time the two of them baked cupcakes for Dustin’s birthday. They had tasted awful because Mike had accidentally put salt into them.

No, you don’t judge me. ‘Cause you see it from same point of view

They rarely fought. One look was enough to understand the other...

“Oh, you’re baking.”

Terry Ives walked in the kitchen with a pleasant smile on her lips. She gave her daughter a half-hug and kissed her cheek before cleaning a bit of flour from her chin.

“Why are you baking?”

“It’s Mike’s birthday tomorrow.”

“Oh, that’s right.” Terry sneaked a finger into the bowl, stealing a bit of chocolate batter and tasting it. “Hum, it’s tasty.”

“Thanks, Mama. All I did was follow the recipe.”

Terry shook her head. “No, you did it with love. That’s why it tastes good.”

Eleven’s lips curled into a half-smile. Yeah, love.

She loved Mike. Of course, she did. He was her best friend. The first friend she made in Hawkins. He was there for her, in the good and bad times, in health and sickness, in all those stupid vows that people always connected to marriage. They had all that in their friendship.

But was it enough?

Was it accurate?

Eleven spent the rest of the evening and night with those thoughts in her head. She tried to interact with her mother as they did and ate dinner together, as they watched TV for a couple of hours before going to bed, but, in the back of her head, Mike was there. Mike and their stupid situation and her damn feelings.

What feelings?

She had no feelings.

It was two am in the morning and she had yet fallen asleep, staring at

the walls in her bedroom, drowning in them.

She thought about calling Max. But Max hated when people woke her up. Then, she thought about sending Sean a message. He probably wouldn't be in bed yet. But... she felt she spent too much time talking to him now. And, anyways, they weren't the ones she wanted to talk to.

Focusing her eyes on one of the photographs she had glued to her wall above her bed, a photo of Mike and her eating ice-cream together, Eleven felt a sort of nostalgia. She missed those good old days when it didn't matter if Mike was dating Jennifer Hayes and she was seeing a kid from the theatre group. It had been so easy. No second-thoughts on anything. No craving for each other's attention. Nothing relationship-like.

Could they go back to that?

There was a weird noise coming from outside the house. Something that was too close to her balcony. Something that shouldn't be there because it was the freaking first floor of a house.

Eleven laid still, her fingers gripping on the bed sheets. She closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

What the hell was happening?

Suddenly, two quick knocks were heard and her name was whispered.

Eleven opened her eyes and tilted her head to look at the balcony. The external blinds were down.

Two more knocks. Her name.

Pulling the sheets from her body, Eleven sat up slowly. She kept looking at the balcony door, worried.

Her name was whispered again.

Eleven frowned and stood up. She recognized that voice.

She started to pull the external blinds up. They first revealed two long legs covered in a pair of dark jeans. Then, a grey hoodie. Finally, Mike's face. Mike's messy black hair. He looked at her like he was in pain.

Eleven blinked.

It was the middle of the night and Mike was standing in her balcony.

How did he climb it? He could have got hurt! Was he crazy?!

She opened the sliding door, feeling angry that he had put himself in dangerous, and growled, "Michael—"

"What?" He asked, out of breath, looking pissed off.

Eleven backed up, the anger suddenly vanishing from her body. She didn't know what to say.

But Mike did.

"You've been ignoring me, El! You told me to fuck off. What the hell is wrong with you?" He demanded to know, his hands curled into fists.

"I don't have to spend every day of my life with you, Mike," Eleven replied, trying to keep a calm attitude. Mike blinked, his eyes showing how hurt had invaded him with her words. "I felt like spending some time on my own, without you, what's so wrong with that?"

Mike looked confused, his eyes flickering around, never meeting hers, as he tried to understand what she had said to him. Then, he frowned.

"Then, tell me that. Tell me that you want some time on your own, El. Don't tell me to fuck off like I'm an annoying kid who is trying to steal your fuckin' crayons in school."

Eleven looked at him with surprise. Against her own will, her lips twitched into a half-smile. Did he just compare them two a couple of kids? Why was he like this?

"It's my birthday, El," Mike said in a hurting voice.

Eleven looked behind at her, as if time was in there, waiting to reveal itself for her. But she didn't need a clock to know it was past midnight. She had been staring at her walls, watching the numbers go by. It was July, 30th. It was Mike's birthday.

"I'm sorry," she muttered.

"Oh, you're sorry? But you weren't with me at midnight," he spitted out. "You didn't even call me. Or text! Nothing. I don't-" He finally stepped inside her bedroom – "I don't know what I did to make you want to have some time of your own, away from me, but... El, come on. It's my birthday. We always spent it together."

Eleven didn't say anything. She just stared at him.

"We're friends, El," Mike reminded her. "Above all, we're friends."

"What are you doing here?" Eleven asked, revolted. She looked inside the house, to where her mother was laying on the couch, sleeping. She had been having some rough days.

"You didn't come to school the last few days," a fifteen-year-old Mike said. He shook one of his shoulders, the one where his schoolbag's strap was on. "I brought you some homework. I thought we could study together."

Eleven frowned.

"But..." What was he thinking?

When she added nothing to her sentence, Mike remarked, "We're friends, right? That's what friends do."

Eleven raised an eyebrow.

"You're my English partner. We don't have any project right now to deliver."

Mike stared at her, dumbfounded.

“What?” He let out. “We... We are friends, El.”

“We are?” Eleven said, shocked.

“Yeah. Above all – classmates or English partners, - we’re friends. And friends help each other out.”

Eleven’s lips curled into a sad smile.

“Why are you smiling?” Mike asked.

“Do you want to watch all three High School Musical movies with me?” She asked in a hopeful offer of peace.

Mike blinked, at first feeling confused. Then, all his desperation and sorrow dissipated from his entire body. You could see him physically relax, his brown eyes filled with kindness and contentment. He chuckled softly and turned around to close the sliding doors of the balcony.

Finally, his lips stretched out in a joyful smile.

“Only if we get to cuddle.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Of course.”

They spent all night up, singing along to the cheesy, yet wonderful movie songs and teasing each other with playful gestures, like Mike pulling softly her ears and Eleven rubbing her cold feet against his warm legs in retaliation. There were a lot of muffled giggles, hands intertwined together and soft smiles. They didn’t kiss once, nor talked about the past days. They were friends. Just friends, watching childhood movies together and enjoying each other’s company.

There was no Tina, no Sean, no world.

They heard Eleven’s mother arriving from her night shift, at seven am. They stayed quiet then, closing the laptop and placing it on the floor by the bed. They waited, hearing Terry Ives moving around the house.

“Mike?” Eleven whispered after they heard her mother’s bedroom door close.

“Yes?” He murmured, his chin resting on her shoulder.

“Happy birthday.”

He pressed a quick kiss on her shoulder.

“Thank you, El.”

July, 30th. Sunday. 15:1

“Nancy!” Eleven exclaimed happily, throwing her arms around Mike’s older sister. Behind her stood two guys, her high school boyfriend with a weird hairstyle, Steve, and her college boyfriend, who seemed like one of those very quiet people, Jonathan. “How have you been?!”

“Oh, I’ve been fine.” Nancy had one of the sweetest smiles in the world. “I don’t think you’ve met Jonathan?” She pointed at the quiet boy who had an awkward smile on his lips.

“Hi,” Eleven walked to him and shook his hand. “My name is Jane, but everyone calls me Eleven.”

Jonathan chuckled.

“Yeah, I’ve heard.”

Eleven’s eyes brightened up.

“You did?”

“Yeah, Nancy talks about you sometimes.”

“She does?” Eleven turned to Nancy, her mouth open in amazement.

“Good Lord,” Mike muttered as he approached the scene. “Stop idolizing my sister.”

Eleven glared at Mike while Nancy hit him on his arm. He rubbed it, pretending to be hurt.

“You should idolize me too, little brother,” Nancy remarked.

Mike made a face.

“I think I’ll pass on that one. Oh, hey,” he finally noticed Steve and Jonathan and moved to greet them. “How are you guys? Thanks for coming.”

“Yeah, no problem,” Jonathan said with a small smile. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks.”

“We wouldn’t miss it, Mike, you know that,” Steve added, yet his eyes glanced at the upset figure of Ted Wheeler, standing a few meters away from them, talking to his wife and the Henderson couple. “No big, fat monster could stop us.”

Mike tried to laugh at it.

“Steve, come on,” Nancy approached her boyfriend. “No jokes like that. We don’t need that today. It’s my little brother’s birthday.” She turned to Mike. “He’s turning twenty-one today! Becoming a little man!”

Steve and Eleven made an *awn* sound together. Mike rolled his eyes at them and Nancy giggled. Jonathan stared at them, awkward, still trying to adjust to the family environment.

“You all disgust me,” Mike stated with a very serious expression and walked away.

They watched as he approached Dustin and Ceci on the other side of the backyard.

“That’s Dustin’s girlfriend, right?” Nancy asked.

Eleven nodded before saying, “Yeah, Ceci. She’s amazing.”

Nancy crossed her arms comfortably in front of her stomach. Both her boyfriends approached her, taking place on each side of her, almost like her bodyguards.

“What about Mike?”

Eleven blinked.

“What about him?” She asked, confused.

“Does he have an amazing girlfriend as well that I don’t know about?”

Eleven thought about Tina. She shook her head.

“That’s something you have to ask him about, Nance,” she answered.

Nancy rolled her eyes.

“Like Mike tells me anything about his feelings!”

Steve and Jonathan shared a knowing glance and snickered. They probably had heard that complaint from Nancy a million times before.

Suddenly, Nancy realized the two of them were surrounding her. Stepping away, she waved her hands in the air almost as if she was sweeping them away.

“God, stop acting like I’m a princess in need of two princes. My Dad isn’t going to do anything to me.” Her eyes flickered to where Ted Wheeler was still talking to Dustin’s parents.

“But Nancy,” both Jonathan and Steve whined.

“No!” She exclaimed. “I’m going to get myself a lemonade. Jesus.”

Nancy stormed away, cursing under her breath. Steve and Jonathan watched her go.

“Don’t follow her,” Eleven advised.

“Oh, we know,” Steve said.

"Yeah, she needs five minutes. Then, she comes back," Jonathan explained with a kind smile.

"We know the drill, sis," Steve added with a smirk.

Someone called Eleven. She looked around and saw Dustin waving his hand at her, asking her to come over. She excused herself to Jonathan and Steve and then walked up to them.

Mike immediately dropped an arm around her shoulders, snuggling against her. Eleven smiled happily at him.

"Help us out, El," Dustin asked. "Would you rather shoot someone you love in the leg or watch animal porn for one hour straight?"

Eleven stared at Dustin with no reaction. Mike laughed.

"I told you, man."

"She'll have an answer."

"This is disgusting," Ceci commented.

"El, you have to answer," Dustin said with a serious expression.

"Why? Did any of your answer?"

There was a quiet moment in which Dustin stared at her, dumb-looking, and Ceci rolled her eyes. Mike snickered.

"You didn't," Eleven concluded. "Why should I?"

"Because you're the one that always has the balls to answer," Mike answered. Eleven raised an eyebrow, surprised. "Dustin's words, not mine."

Eleven snorted and shook her head.

"Well, fine, I'll answer."

Dustin pumped his fist in the air, happy.

"I think... Shoot someone I love in the leg."

“Really?” Ceci asked, shocked. But Eleven believed the girl would be shocked no matter which of the possibilities she had chosen.

“Well, yeah,” she answered, letting herself fall against Mike’s body. The boy’s hand caressed her arm and she pretended her heart didn’t skip a beat. “I mean, if I love that person, then that person must love me too, right? And, if that person loves me, they will understand the reason why I am shooting them.” She made a face. “After all, it’s one hour of watching *animal porn*.”

Ceci and Dustin stared at her, open-mouthed. She looked up at Mike, who beamed in pride and hugged her tightly against his chest.

“That’s my El.”

That was, for sure, Mike’s El.

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make me smile.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello everyone!

Here's a new chapter. I don't know when I'll be able to post the next one since I'm going away for a week and I won't take my laptop with me.

The lyrics used in this chapter belong to the following songs:

Carlão – Viver para sempre (Live forever) (It's an amazing Portuguese song. I just had to.)

Rita Ora – Poison

Dua Lipa – New Rules

Ed Sheeran - Happier

I hope you guys enjoy this chapter. I'm sorry about the angst.

July, 31st. Monday. 23:23

“It’s too early, man,” Dustin warned, holding Ceci’s hand and keeping her from wandering off with a bottle of wine in her hand. It wasn’t even midnight and she was already way too drunk.

Mike didn’t listen to his friend’s warning. With one arm wrapped around Eleven’s shoulder, keeping her close to him, he walked up to the bouncer, who they did not recognize, and asked for Matty. The guy frowned, saying Matty would only show up around one am.

“Awn, man!” Mike complained. He looked down at El. “I have to buy you a shot.”

Eleven rolled her eyes. She was soberer than Mike and Ceci, just feeling a bit too relaxed for her usual self. Mike’s arm around her made her feel warm inside.

“We can drink shots after one am, Michael. It’s not like we have a

curfew.”

Mike groaned. She pulled him away from the disco’s entrance and they met up with Dustin and Ceci. The boy was trying to talk his girlfriend into not giving away their bottle of wine.

“It’s ours, Ceci, okay?! I know those people look nice, but we paid for this bottle, remember?”

Ceci’s eyes went wide-opened in full wonder. She threw her hands around her boyfriend, proclaiming that he was the best person ever and she loved him dearly. Dustin, who was completely sober, sighed and hugged her back, patting her back gently.

Mike and Eleven shared a smug look before the boy dropped his forehead against her head and whispered in her ear.

“El, will you dance with me tonight?”

Eleven nodded, keeping her head facing forwards so she wouldn’t be tempted to kiss him. She knew she was more sober than drunk, she could keep herself together more easily, but a sober Eleven had always wanted Mike too and that could be a problem on a night like this.

They waited around for one am, Dustin babysitting his drunk girlfriend, who was leaving in a few days and wanted to enjoy this night out as if it were the last one she would ever get, and Mike and Eleven murmuring about random topics while their fingers played with each other over their laps.

“El, el,” Mike called her in a whisper-voice.

She looked up at him and smiled. He was so drunk, so happy he had turned twenty-one and could drink alcohol with no legal restrictions.

“What?” She asked in an almost soundless tone.

He leaned closer, his nose touching hers, and raised his hand to grab the tip of her braided brown hair.

“I like your hair.”

Eleven smiled and rubbed her nose against his.

“Thank you. I had to look pretty for your birthday, didn’t I?” She asked, teasing him.

Dustin suddenly stood up from the bench they had all been sitting and went after Ceci, who had managed to escape from his lap and was now chasing a cute cat she had seen.

“El,” Mike pulled back a bit, giving her a firm look, “you always look pretty.”

Eleven pretended not to be affected by his words, looking away, hiding her blush. He had said that to her a million times before. It meant nothing by now. It had to be mean nothing.

“Guys, Matty’s here,” Dustin announced, pulling Ceci by her waist. He motioned with his chin to the disco’s entrance on the other side of the street, where the bouncier was now greeting some people in line and letting them in. “Let’s go in?”

A song with a kind of uncanny vibe was playing when they found their way to the dance floor. Only Ceci started to dance, too drunk to care about the fact she did not recognize the song at all. The other three stared at each other in quietness, trying to avoid other people’s bodies bumping into them – which, good Lord, was so disgusting because some of them were already so sweaty -, until another song came on, one that was more like their style.

As the singer began to sing, they realize they didn’t understand any of the lyrics as they were sung in another language, but the rhythm of the song was so good that they started to dance.

A vida são dois dias, mas eu quero um terceiro

Mike played with Eleven’s braid, dancing with it. She rolled her eyes at him. Drunk Mike was always such an excited, childlike Mike who just wanted to have fun.

As the song faded away and a new one came up, Dustin joined Ceci in a dance and Mike grabbed Eleven's hand, pulling her close. She looked at him, confused, until he signalled with his head to the bar. He owed her a shot.

"Here it is," Mike smiled at the bartender, showing his ID, a proof that he was twenty-one and could drink. "Two shots, please!"

The bartender looked over at Eleven.

"I'll need both your IDs."

Eleven avoided his eyes, trying to act calm.

"Dude, come on!" Mike exclaimed. "We're inside. How old do you think we gotta be to be inside?"

"Twenty-one," the man answered and looked at Mike's ID. "You turned twenty-one yesterday. It means that you were twenty before that. Which probably means she's twenty," he concluded, his eyes on Eleven.

Mike dropped an arm around Eleven's shoulders and pulled her close, under his protection. He looked at the bartender with a serious expression.

"Listen, man. I'm celebrating my birthday, yeah. And this girl here – "He pointed at Eleven – "This beautiful girl here is expecting me to pay her a shot. I've been promising her that since we're kids, man!"

Eleven rolled her eyes at Mike's dramatics while the bartender snorted.

"Please, man. Let me just buy her one shot." Mike's eyes turned into those puppy eyes that many people - including some of his college professors – couldn't resist. "It's just... She's so amazing and I don't want to break the promise, you know?"

The bartender raised an eyebrow, his attention moving from Mike to Eleven. The girl forced a nice smile on her lips.

"Is she your girlfriend?" The bartender asked.

Mike blinked.

“What?”

The bartender put two empty shot glasses in front of them and grabbed a tequila bottle.

“I will only fill these in if she’s your girlfriend, man.”

Mike looked at Eleven and the girl blinked at him, confused.

“And,” the bartender continued, “You gotta prove to me that you are actually a couple. That’s the only way I can do you this favour, man.”

Eleven and Mike stared at each other again.

The man smirked. He thought he had got them, that they would drop the request and leave because, clearly, they wouldn’t want to do something that-

“I’m his girlfriend,” Eleven stated with a big smile. “And we can prove that.”

The bartender raised an eyebrow, waiting.

Mike looked at her, too drunk to find rational words to articulate, and watched as she grabbed her cell phone from her small purse and opened her photos gallery. Then, she showed the bartender an old post-sex picture of the two of them, laying on the sofa that Mike and Dustin had on their flat. It was one of the many photographic records they had about the places they had had sex in that flat. Their idea was to show them all to Dustin once they finished college and moved out from there.

The bartender showed his defeat by pouring two shots of tequila, getting them slices of lemon and salt as well. Mike paid him and the man left them be.

“Are you ready?” Mike asked, picking his glass of shot and holding one hand up with a bit of salt over its back.

Eleven nodded.

“One, two, ... three.”

They licked the salt, drank the shot and then bit the slice of lemon like their lives depended on it.

Eleven made a face and closed her eyes, waiting for the awful, strong taste of tequila to vanish from her throat completely. In front of her, Mike was already smiling. He was too drunk to even feel the drink's taste.

I picked my poison and it's you...

Eleven's ears perked up as she caught on the song that was playing in full volume.

You're goin' straight to my head

And I'm headin' straight for the edge

A smile stretched out on Eleven's lips. She grabbed Mike by his hand and pulled him to the dance floor. She wrapped her arms around his neck and started dancing. Mike put his hands on her waist, and then let them slide over to her back, pulling her close.

“Nothing ever gets me high like this,” Eleven sang along, her lips close to Mike's, but she wouldn't give in tonight. Oh no. They would just be two friends, dancing together. No kissing. No making-out leading to sex. Nothing that could be considered un-friend.

Eventually, the song changed. Dua Lipa's melodic voice started singing about a trashy boy who did not deserve her heart. She had rules now. She would follow them and get over him.

“And if you're under him, you ain't getting over him,” Eleven stared at Mike as she sung these words to him.

His eyes glanced down at her lips for a second and then back at her.

What was she trying to say with it? What were they doing?

Eleven pulled away from his body, never stopping dancing. She turned around, moving her hips to the beat, smiling at Ceci, who was waving at her, her arms around Dustin's shoulders.

Eleven felt Mike's hands sliding over her waist to her stomach. He rested them there, his fingers burrowing in her blue top's material. He was teasing her, looking for something; something she never refused before; something they had been doing for over three years.

Mike was expecting her to give in anytime soon because this was them being themselves. One dark dancefloor, the two of them drunk, and their mouths always found each other.

The song changed again. *I feel It Coming* by The Weeknd and Daft Punk started playing. Mike and Eleven's body moved together, their hips touching. She closed her eyes and laid her head against his chest. Mike's lips touched her cheek, his nose traced down a path to her ear and he whispered her name. He was pushing all the right buttons.

You've been scared of love and what it did you to

You don't have to run, I know what you've been through

Max had told her that she and Dustin had had sex and then realized it was enough. Maybe that's what she and Mike needed to do. One more time and then it was over. Then, they would only be friends. He would go off to date Tina and she would give Sean an opportunity.

Opening her eyes, Eleven decided she was ready to give in, for the last time ever, and turned around. She wrapped her arms around Mike and tilted her head up, giving him permission to kiss her. He did it without a blink, his lips hungry and frantic against hers.

Mike's hands were everywhere, touching her skin, touching her top,

going for her braided hair, caressing her cheekbones, her ears. His lips went from mouth to her neck to her chin, back to her lips. He was like a man who had been deprived of the one thing that kept him alive and was now tasting it again after a long time without it.

Eleven suddenly found herself thinking about the first time they kissed when they were seventeen. It had happened in a party, of course, at Matt's, the bouncer, house. There had been so much free booze and the two of them were still so sad that both their romantic relationships hadn't worked out that they had decided to grab two bottles of wine and sneak into one of the bedrooms. They had drunk their asses off, lying next to each other on the someone's bed, laughing and talking about the most random shit, and then, out of blue, there had been a quiet moment between them. Mike had stared at her, told her she was beautiful, and Eleven had leaned in and kissed him without giving it a second thought. He had kissed her back.

They met up the next day and went on with their lives as if the previous night hadn't happened. A new party came around and they found themselves making out in the middle of their classmates. Then, another party and another make-out session. And it kept happening. They never talked about it. They were happy as they were.

Song after song came. Mike and Eleven never detached their lips from each other. They didn't care about the people that bumped into them or the fact that, maybe, they were the ones that were in their way.

It was a last time. A last time to be with each other.

"Guys."

Eleven was pulled away from Mike. Dustin had grabbed the boy's arm to call his attention. He had a distraught look on his face.

"Ceci isn't feeling well. Can we go, please?"

Eleven looked behind Dustin and saw Ceci, who was sitting in the middle of the dance floor, crying her eyes out for no apparent reason. People were asking her if she was okay, but the girl kept asking for

her boyfriend.

Sighing, Dustin approached her and helped her get up. Mike reacted; looked at Eleven, confused, and then went to help Dustin carry Ceci out of the building.

“At least, the car is parked nearby,” Eleven said as soon as they were outside. She wrapped her arms around herself and followed them.

Ceci kept on babbling about something, her head falling on Dustin’s shoulder, her legs barely keeping her up.

“What happened, man?”

“I don’t know, dude!” Dustin snapped. “She went to freaking bathroom. I waited outside. She came out even crazier than before. We danced for a bit and then she just lost it.”

They got to Dustin’s car. He asked Eleven to take the keys from his jeans’ pocket and unlock it.

“Sure,” she muttered and did as he had asked.

Soon, she was in the backseat with Ceci’s head on her lap. She had fallen asleep, something that got Dustin even more upset because he was worried it would worsen her situation. He and Mike spent the ride arguing about what could have possibly happened while Eleven stroked the sleeping girl’s hair.

“Someone gave her something, man,” Dustin said, angry. “They had to. She was so drunk. Fuck! I’m an awful boyfriend.”

“Dude,” Mike let out. Eleven looked over at the two of them. Mike had a hand over the wheeler, helping Dustin keep it controlled. “You’re not an awful boyfriend. That’s an absurd. You did all you could. You couldn’t go in with her!”

“But I should have known!”

“How?” Mike’s voice rose. Dustin sent him a glare. “How were you supposed to know, Dustin? Jesus! She’s fine!”

“She’s passed out!”

“She’s sleeping,” Eleven stepped in. “She’s fine, Dustin.”

Dustin glanced at her over the rear mirror.

“She’s fine,” Eleven repeated in a soothing tone.

Dustin’s shoulders relaxed a bit and he nodded at Eleven through the rear mirror. She smiled softly. Mike finally let go of the wheel.

They decided to leave Ceci with Eleven that night. Her mother would be working all day, pulling off two shifts in a row, and they would be on their own. Dustin could easily tell his parents that the two girls decided to have a sleepover, and then come over after breakfast to check on her.

Mike and Dustin both carried Ceci to Eleven’s bedroom.

“Are you sure you can deal with it?” Dustin asked, concerned.

Eleven patted his arm.

“I am. And she will be fine. She just needs to sleep it off, okay?”

Dustin nodded. Sharing a quick look with Mike, the two boys said their goodbyes and walked out of the house.

Eleven watched their car drive away and then closed the door. Taking a long breath, she went to the kitchen and drank a full glass of water. All her plans had been ruined. The all thing of sleeping with Mike one last time was gone now. She wouldn’t have the guts to do it again. And they probably wouldn’t get drunk and go party anytime soon.

Climbing up the stairs slowly, she dragged her tired body to her bedroom. Taking one look at Ceci, she decided to take off the girl’s shoes and jeans. Then, she pushed the girl’s body to the other side of the bed, even though the bed was so small that they would barely have space for the two of them, changed from her clothes to her pyjamas and laid down, pulling the sheets over them.

She laid awake, her eyes open, staring at the contents spread on her desk and on her shelves, for a while. She couldn't sleep, but there was not rational thought going through her head either. She was stuck in a limbo of unconscious awareness.

Suddenly, a phone buzzed.

Realizing she had left it inside her purse, on the floor, Eleven groaned and stood up. She went back to bed and only then checked the message.

Wheeler my boy

Can I come over tomorrow too?

Eleven frowned and sent a 'sure'. Why couldn't he come over too?

Mike's answer came straightaway.

Wheeler my boy

I love you, El.

Eleven stared at the message with no reaction. She blinked a few times, re-read those four words, and then blocked her phone and threw it to the floor. She would not read between the lines.

August, 15th. Tuesday. 16:31

"These cupcakes are so good, Miss Ives," Mike complimented as he went to grab another cupcake from the plate.

Eleven's mother beamed in happiness as she pushed another cupcake in his direction, even though already had one.

“Here, eat as many as you want, Mike.”

“Mama,” Eleven called, “you’re going to get him fat.”

Mike made an offended sound as he took a bite from one of the cupcakes he was holding.

“I cannot get fat, El,” Mike complained, chewing.

She wrinkled her nose at him as he had little leftovers of chocolate cupcake all over his mouth.

Mike had showed up uninvited at the Ives house, like he did so many times (Eleven would never forget how happy her mother had been when she first met Mike five years ago. It was like the boy had been an angel that came into their lives). Today, he got lucky and arrived just in time to be greeted by a warm cupcake batch made by Terry and Eleven.

Terry looked over at the watch over the kitchen’s door and sighed. She stood up.

“I’m going to take a quick shower and get ready for work.” She stopped by Eleven and laid a kiss on her head. “Behave, okay?”

Eleven rolled her eyes affectionately.

“Don’t worry, Mama.”

“I’ll take care of her, Miss Ives,” Mike promised with his mouth full of cupcake.

Terry patted the boy’s messy, dark hair and left the kitchen. Mike turned to Eleven with a proud lips-pressed smile.

Eleven hit her shoulder against his and snorted. That boy was so ridiculous.

Dustin was currently visiting Ceci’s hometown, a small place in Vermont. They had left on August 3rd, leaving Mike and El to put up with each other for, at least, two weeks. After that night out, they hadn’t partied again. Whatever plans Eleven had had for them then

were completely doomed.

“So,” Mike started, sucking each of his fingers after eating the two cupcakes, “what are we going to do tonight?”

Eleven shrugged and stood up. She grabbed both her and his empty orange juice glasses and took them to the counter.

“We can re-watch some show.”

Mike liked the idea. “Okay. Which one?”

“Sherlock?” Eleven suggested as she washed the glasses.

“From BBC?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah, I like that,” Mike agreed.

Eleven heard the chair being dragged on the floor and then, the boy added, “I’m going to get your laptop. Watch it on the living-room?”

“Yeah.

“Order pizza later?”

Eleven hummed in agreement. Mike left the kitchen. The wooden stairs grinded under his steps as he went to the first floor.

Eleven left the two glasses drying on top of a stretched cloth that her mother always had on the counter and then went to the living-room. She gathered most of the cushions and dropped them on the sofa. They always liked to be drown in cushions when marathoning TV shows.

“Okay,” Mike walked in the living-room, her laptop on his hands already opened, “I’ve already put the first episode on. Let’s hope your Wi-Fi isn’t shitty today.”

“It’s never shitty!”

Mike glanced at her and smiled to himself, shaking his head.

Eleven cleaned everything that was on top of the coffee table and Mike put down the laptop. Her mobile speaker was on top of the keyboard. He grabbed it and connected it to the laptop.

“I miss Sherlock,” Eleven confessed, making herself comfortable in the sea of cushions. Mike sat down next to her, chuckling. “Don’t you?”

“I miss it until they ruined everything,” he replied, grabbing a cushion and placing on his lap.

“No gay Sherlock and John Watson, right?” Eleven moved her head and laid it on his shoulder.

“Right.”

They watched the first episode of the first season in complete silence. Eleven’s mom came around, said her goodbye to the teenagers and gave them some money for pizza. Then, she went to work.

The second episode had a bit more of comments being thrown back and forwards between the two. Eleven changed her position and put her legs over Mike’s lap, leaning against the sofa’s arm.

Before the third episode, they ordered a pizza for the two of them. Halfway through it, they had to pause it and get the pizza from the door.

“Ugh, coke,” Eleven complained. “Why did they offer us a coke?” She asked.

Mike, who had showed up in the living-room with the pizza and a coke offered by the pizza place, shrugged and sat down next to her.

“It’s the most basic drink to offer.”

“It’s disgusting,” Eleven remarked and stood up. “I’m getting myself water.”

When she came back, she found Mike already chewing on one big slice of pizza. She rolled her eyes, sat down next to him and grabbed a slice of her own.

“Can I press play?” Mike asked with his mouth full of food.

She nodded, chewing.

Mike leaned forwards and pressed on the enter-button of the keyboard. Then, he laid back and enjoyed the third episode of Sherlock while eating pizza and rejoicing at all the coke he had for himself.

His phone buzzed at some point. Eleven glanced at him as he took the phone from his pocket and read whatever message he had received. A small smile appeared on lips.

It was Tina. It could only be her.

“Dustin is asking if we can go pick him up in three days, Mike announced. He looked up at Eleven. “I think my mom can lend me her car. What do you say?”

Eleven blinked and nodded. She turned her eyes to the episode, but her mind was miles away from there.

She had been betrayed by her own thoughts. Not everything was about Tina, was it now? Dustin was Mike’s best friend. He made him happy. Of course, Mike would get a text from him and smile...

“Ask him how Ceci is doing,” she requested.

Mike nodded.

After a bit, he said, “Dustin says she’s fine.”

“Good,” Eleven muttered.

When the episode of Sherlock came to an end, they looked at each other and then at the time. It was half past eight.

“Season two?” Mike asked.

Eleven agreed.

The boy crouched down in front of the laptop and began clicking

around on the illegal website.

“How’s Tina?” Eleven suddenly wondered.

Mike looked behind his shoulder, an eyebrow raised in surprise. Eleven kept staring at him, challenging him to answer her.

“She’s fine. She’s on vacation with her parents,” Mike replied. “How’s Sean?”

“Good. He’s been watching Game of Thrones.”

“Wait,” Mike leaned back, turning his body to her and putting an arm on the sofa’s seat. “He didn’t watch Game of Thrones?”

“Dude, the last season is on.”

“Oh shit, that’s right.” Mike pressed play on the Sherlock episode and sat back on the sofa. He turned to Eleven. “We’re going to marathon that when it’s over, right?”

Mike and Eleven never watched the episodes of Game of Thrones when they aired. They waited until all season was out and then watched it in a row. It was awful when they came across some spoilers, but they managed to avoid them pretty well.

“Of course.”

Mike swung against her, their shoulders touching. Eleven looked over at him, saw the stupid grin he had on his face, and chuckled.

“You’re an idiot.”

August, 30th. Wednesday. 15:00

Eleven greeted Mrs. Wheeler with a smile and gave little Holly a hug, making small chat with the girl for five minutes. Then, she climbed up the stairs and went to meet Mike’s bedroom closed door. There was a muffled sound of a song playing. Eleven smiled and knocked three times on the door.

“Come in.” Mike’s stifled voice said.

Eleven opened the door, took a quick look at the bedroom and walked in. A song she recognized belonging to the band *Foster The People* was playing. Mike was sitting on the windowsill, taking in the nice buff of fresh air coming from the outside and enjoying the simple view of his bedroom to the backyard of his neighbours’ house.

“Who are you spying on?” Eleven asked, putting down her purse and taking off her shoes.

“No one is home,” Mike complained. He raised his hand, showing her the joint he was smoking.

Smirking, Eleven approached him, took the joint from his hands and then managed to hop on the windowsill, sitting in front of her best friend. Like Mike, she left a leg hanging in the air, their feet touching.

They were in silence for a while, both looking out of the window. Eleven smoked peacefully, taking in the smooth burn of the joint.

They hadn’t seen each other in a few days. Eleven’s mother had taken a couple days off and took her out on a small vacation to a city nearby. It wasn’t a big trip or anything, but they had their fun and spent some quality mother-daughter time together.

“Hey,” Eleven suddenly said.

Mike looked at her and smiled softly.

“Yeah?”

“Do you remember that Marry, Kiss or Kill round with villains from horror stories?”

Mike made a face and nodded. She passed him the joint.

“I still don’t know the answer,” he admitted. “Do you have one?”

She nodded.

“Which is?”

Eleven half-smiled at him.

“I will tell you when you tell me yours.”

Mike rolled his eyes, smoking coming out of his mouth.

“Rude.”

The song changed. When Eleven heard the first chords to OutKast’s *Hey Ya*, she snorted and raised her eyebrow at Mike. He chuckled.

“It’s on YouTube shuffle, man. Don’t blame me,” he argued, passing back the joint. “You can finish it.”

Eleven winked in a quiet thank-you and took a long drag. The smoke was now burning her throat a bit as the cigarette was almost at its end.

They moved their head to beat of the song, smiling at each other every time their eyes met.

Eventually, Eleven squashed the joint against the outside of the windowsill and then threw it as far as she could. Mike chuckled.

“I think my neighbours will someday find all the joints and realize that they are living next to a junkie,” he joked.

Eleven rolled her eyes and hit his leg with hers.

“You’re an idiot.”

Mike snorted.

“Tell me something new.”

“I’m pretty sure Taylor Swift is dead,” Eleven stated.

Mike raised an eyebrow, confused.

“I haven’t heard of her name in years.”

Mike rolled his eyes and laid his head back on the wall.

“She’s probably recording a new evil CD.”

Eleven hit him with her leg again.

“Dude, she’s fun.”

Mike made a face.

“You hurt me, El, but whatever.”

Eleven took a deep breath, exaggerating on her chest’s movements as she breathed, and then crossed her arms in front of her stomach.

“You’re such a hipster.”

“No, I’m not.”

Fluorescent Adolescent by Arctic Monkeys started playing.

Eleven sent Mike a ‘oh really?’ kind of look. He rolled his eyes at her.

“Arctic Monkeys aren’t a hipster thing, El.”

They were quiet for a few seconds, taking in the song’s lyrics.

“Honestly, I don’t know what being a hipster is anymore,” Eleven confessed.

Her best friend glanced at her, a small smirk on his lips.

“Being a hipster is something that is dead. Everyone wants to be one, so it just becomes... mainstream.”

Eleven tilted her head, agreeing with him.

“How smart you are,” she teased.

Mike winked at her.

“Yeah, I know. A genius, really.”

Eleven laughed and leaned forwards to hit his knee. Mike pretended to be hurt by her action.

“You’re such a weirdo,” they found themselves saying at the same time and smiled, surprised.

But how could they be surprised if that happened so many times?

“Anyways,” Mike began, “Watching all Game of Thrones episodes tomorrow? Dustin wants to watch them with us.”

“Yeah, sure.” Eleven paused. “One of the dragons dies, though.”

Mike freaked, “Dude, what?!”

Eleven made a sorry face.

“Sean accidentally told me.”

Mike threw his head back, hitting it against the wall. He let out a small ‘ow’ and rubbed the back of the head.

“Bad Sean. I don’t like him now.”

Eleven rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, whatever.”

Somebody told me by The Killers started playing, Eleven’s mouth dropped in amazement. Then, she smiled and her eyes brightened up. Mike laughed at her.

“Come on,” she said as she stood up and offered him her hand.

Mike stared at her.

“Dance with me,” she asked, tapping with her feet on the floor like an excited kid.

Mike chuckled and accepted her hand. He stood up and went to increase the volume of his laptop’s speakers before joining her in the middle of his bedroom to dance.

Their laughs echoed down to the kitchen, where Karen Wheeler was preparing Holly a snack. The woman looked up at the ceiling and smiled softly.

Those two kids... Always the same.

“Mike,” Eleven laughed as her friend did a weird dance move. “What are you doing?”

“Dancing,” Mike replied and then hopped on the bed and stretched both his hands to help her up as well.

Smiling, Eleven took his hands and jumped onto his bed. They jumped around, singing along to the song, then to a second one and a third one. They kept teasing each other, getting into an unspoken dance contest of who could dance the worst.

It was good. This was good.

This was them being friends. Good friends. The best of friends. And Eleven couldn't help but feel so utterly happy. There was Mike, smiling at her, dancing with her and singing in a funny accent to make her laugh.

She missed it. She missed being only Mike's friend, without worrying about other girls, girls that could steal him away from a deal, an undeclared deal, that they had going on for three years now... If she were just his friend, she wouldn't worry about it at all, right?

And she was sure that someday, in some distant future, they would look back and agree that their all friends-with-benefits relationship had been too much; they had overdone it. Three years giving it too much of their attention had kind of ruined anything else for them. But they would also agree that they managed to get over it. They found other people. And, in the future, the two of them would still be friends. And they would laugh about what was happening now.

Right?

A calmer song started playing. Mike and Eleven fell on their stomachs on his bed and sighed happily. They were sweating and their breaths were out of control, but they were pleased.

Walking down 29th and Park

I saw you in another's arms

Eleven smiled.

"What?" Mike asked.

"I know this song," she said. "*Saw you walk inside a bar...* Mike, sing with me."

He snorted.

"No."

"Come on. I know you know this song."

"No, I don't."

"Michael."

"Eleven."

"Don't be an ass to your best friend."

Mike gave her a sharp look. She pouted, batting her eyes. He sighed, giving in – because he always gave in to her wishes - and his husky voice started singing along.

'Cause baby you look happier, you do

My friends told me one day I'll feel it too

And until then I'll smile to hide the truth

Eleven smiled softly, watching Mike sing to her. He was trying to be dramatic about it, but she knew, that deep down, he liked the song and was happy to sing it. Well, as happy as one could be singing a song about broken hearts.

Their eyes met, a small smile on their lips, and, suddenly, they both sung.

Ain't nobody hurt you like I hurt you

But ain't nobody need you like I do

Why did her heart start to hurt?

"But my darling... I am still in love with you," Mike barely whispered the lyrics, making his eyes roll in a dramatic way.

But Eleven didn't giggle. She just stared at him, her heart hammering against her chest.

It hurt.

Shit. It hurt. Because she knew this was it. This was their goodbye.

Mike realized she wasn't taking in the song lightly. But he said nothing, too scared to know what was going through her mind.

They stared at each other for the rest of the song, sinking in what was happening.

There was Tina and there was Sean. They were two good people and school was going to start soon. They would leave in just a few days.

Everything's reminding me of you

Nursing an empty bottle and telling myself you're happier

Mike would ask Tina to be his girlfriend. Sean would certainly do the same with El. Why wouldn't he? She liked him, really, she did. And it wasn't fair for him, or Tina, to be left behind for some stupid no-emotions attached deal that Mike and Eleven had started three years ago. They deserved better. They deserved a Mike and an Eleven committed to them.

It was a change and it scared Eleven, like all changes did. But maybe

it was for the best. Everything comes to an end, right? And this wouldn't be a terrible one. She would still have Mike after all. He would still be her best friend.

Because, above all – classmates, English partners, sex buddies -, they were friends.

I knew one day you'd fall for someone new

But if he breaks your heart like lovers do

“Just know that I'll be waiting here for you,” Mike sung quietly.

The song ended.

A new came on, but their ears weren't listening.

They stared at each other until Mike took the initiative and leaned forwards to kiss her.

One last kiss.

Yeah, this was their goodbye.

Notes for the Chapter:

(The Portuguese song verse can be translated to this:
Life is two days, but I want a third one)

Tell me what you think.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello! I'm back!

It was such a crazy week, but I survived!

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize! I wanted to post this so badly that I didn't proof-read it that well.

September, 3rd. Sunday. 16:44

They were almost at the end of their bus trip. This time, it was Eleven that had to sit next to a stranger since she had picked the smallest joint, but, at least, her seat was parallel to the boys'. Dustin was on her left, showing Mike a funny YouTube video. Their chuckles were muffled by a song playing on the radio and other people talking, but she still could hear them and smiled to herself, happy that her two best friends were happy.

The bus driver announced that they would be arriving in fifteen minutes. Eleven sent Max a text, asking the girl if she was already waiting for her at the bus station. Max replied with a thumbs-up emoji.

"Hey El."

Eleven raised her head. Dustin was leaning over his seat's arm and giving her his cell phone.

"Watch this video."

Eleven found herself watching a video of a lady trying to sing a Maria Carey's song in a singing contest. It seemed like an old video. It was funny because the lady didn't know the right words to the song, but she still had what it seemed to be a nice voice.

Eleven gave the phone back to Dustin, saying "You guys find the most random stuff online."

“Thanks, El,” Dustin said with pride in his voice.

They arrived at the bus station in the predicted time. Letting other people get off first, since she didn’t like to be stuck in the middle of crowds, Eleven took her time to stand up, grab her backpack from the over her seat and then finally leaving her seat, moving after Mike and before Dustin.

Max greeted her with a tight hug that surprised her.

“Awn, you’re going to give us one too, Max?” Dustin joked.

Max showed him her middle finger.

“In your dreams, Henderson.”

“Wait,” Mike suddenly said, his eyes on Eleven. “You’re not staying at our place tonight?”

Eleven shook her head.

“Nah, I’m going to the dorms with Max. That’s why she is here.”

“I’m her favourite, Wheeler,” Max added, dropping an arm around Eleven’s neck. “Go cry to sleep tonight thinking about that.”

Mike rolled his eyes and adjusted his bag’s weight over his shoulder.

“Whatever.”

He looked upset. But no one pointed that out.

Eleven and Max made their way out of the bus station while the redhaired girl called for an uber. Mike and Dustin walked back to their place.

“I don’t get why they don’t call an uber too.”

“They live just a few minutes away from here.”

Max made a face, not understanding. Eleven laughed.

“You’re such a lazy person.”

“Hey! I used to skateboard!”

“Used to,” Eleven emphasized as the uber driver pulled over.

Their trip back to the dorms was a quick one. Traffic wasn’t as terrible as usual and the uber driver was a really nice guy who put up with Max’s random questions about his likes and dislikes in life.

“You like mashed potatoes? But how?” Max sounded horrified.

Sometimes, Eleven wondered how she managed to end up being surrounded by idiots in her life.

Suddenly, her phone beeped. From the front seat, Max sent her an excited look.

“Shut it, Max,” Eleven muttered as she picked her phone and read Sean’s message. They had been messaging back and forwards the entire bus drive so she had a way to spend the time.

Sean

That’s cool. I bet you miss Max a lot. Can we have dinner tomorrow, then?

Eleven smiled at her phone and agreed to have dinner with Sean tomorrow. He was sweet. He was nice.

“Thank you so much for your kind patience, Mr. Uber Driver,” Max announced.

Eleven raised her eyes and realized they had stopped and were in front of the campus.

“My name is Jake,” the Uber driver said with a chuckle.

“That’s cool, Mr. Jake Uber Driver. I’ll give you five stars.”

The driver thanked her.

“So,” Max began once they were out of the car and walking to their dorms, “how’s Sean?”

Eleven ignored her at first, which led to Max hitting her arm and demanding attention.

“You’re terrible!” Eleven rubbed her arm, pouting. “He’s fine. We’re going to have dinner tomorrow night.”

“Oooh, someone’s going to get a boyfriend.” Max sung as she took their room’s keys out of her bag.

“Oh, you have psychic powers now, don’t you?” Eleven retorted sarcastically.

Max let her walk first into their bedroom and then shut the door behind them.

“Well, no. But it’s quite obvious, isn’t it?”

“Don’t do that, Max.” Eleven dropped her bags on her bed and sighed. Great, she still had to put the sheets on the bed.

“Do what?”

“Give me whatever hopes for tomorrow.”

Max stared at her, dumbfounded.

“You really want him to ask you out, don’t you?”

Eleven didn’t answer. She started unpacking, knowing she had a pretty busy hour ahead of her. Max, who had come two days before, had already everything in its place.

“El,” Max called out.

“What?”

“Aren’t you going to say something?”

“Whatever I say, you’ll just freak out, so…” Eleven shrugged, kneeling and opening the large drawer under the bed. She grabbed a

bunch of t-shirts and sweatshirts and put them inside of it.

“What about Mike?” Max asked next.

Her heart reacted to that name.

“What about him?”

“Have you two talked about it?”

“About what?” Eleven asked.

Max sighed, exasperated.

“Dude, honestly, stop acting like you don’t know what I’m talking about.”

Eleven stood up, closed the bed’s drawer with her leg and then sat down on the bed, facing Max.

“Listen,” she started, “Mike and I will be fine, okay? No, we haven’t talked about it, but it’s fine. We aren’t dumb. We both know that, eventually, things between us have to change. You and Dustin talked, but you didn’t have someone else. You talked because you realized that it was enough, even though you still hadn’t found Lucas or Ceci. Mike and I have found nice people to be with. That’s why we don’t need to talk about it. We’re just going to follow the logic of the situation and be fine.”

Or, at least, she hoped they would be.

“Okay?” Eleven asked.

Max nodded, without a word.

Letting out a sigh, Eleven stood up and went back to unpacking her clothes.

Max didn’t say anything for a while, sitting on her own bed, watching Eleven work.

It got quite upsetting to feel Max’s eyes burning holes in her back.

Her friend was clearly expecting some kind of reaction, but Eleven didn't have one. It was what it was. She was just going on a date with Sean. If he asked her to be his girlfriend, then she would see what her answer would be.

"How's Lucas?" Eleven asked as she put some of her winter coats inside the wardrobe.

Max, who had lied down to stare at her more comfortably, shrugged.

"Fine. He has an internship this year. I'll be seeing him a bit less." She made a sad face, sighing. "He's so good, El."

Eleven smiled.

"He is?"

"He's, like, something I thought I could never have, you know?"

Eleven's smile trembled.

Would she ever think about Sean in that way?

"I don't know, but I'm happy you do."

Max sat up. She took one good look at her best friend.

"Do you want to watch a movie with me?" She wondered, batting her eyes.

Eleven giggled.

"Will we cuddle?"

Max made an offended face before saying, "Well, of course!"

September, 4th. Monday. 20:11

Eleven stared at Sean as he told her a crazy situation that had happened to this kid from his town during the holiday. He was wearing a soft yellow shirt and had put some gel in his brownish

hair, giving it a sophisticated touch. He was also wearing a nice black watch. He had clearly had a long shower, had taken his time to get ready for tonight. He even brought her a rose. A red fucking rose which was now laying on the table next to Eleven's plate.

If that wasn't enough, Sean had brought her to a fancy restaurant with golden decorations on the ceiling and waitresses that were so polite that made Eleven feel weird.

Damn it, she felt under-dressed for this place. She was wearing jeans, for God's sakes. When Sean had said they would be going to a fancy place, she didn't imagine it would be this fancy.

This is it.

Sean was going to ask her to be his girlfriend.

"And he fell, okay? He freakin' fell and broke no bone. Like, how does that happen? I mean, if I tried to do what he did, I'd probably have two broken legs and a concussion." Sean looked impressed with his own story.

Eleven blinked at him.

Sean frowned.

"Are you okay?" He asked, concerned, and leaned forwards when she didn't react. "El-"

"Are you going to ask me to be your girlfriend?" Eleven interrupted him.

Sean opened his mouth, but the waitress came to deliver their plates at that precise moment. They waited until she was gone, thanking her for her service, and then a terrible silence fell between the two of them.

"Well, are you?" Eleven demanded to know.

Sean made a face.

"Well.... Yeah, but not tonight."

Eleven blinked again, confused.

“Not tonight? You brought me to the fanciest place in town, Sean.”

“Yeah, because I heard it was cool and I wanted to try it out. I worked during summer, so I have so money saved. I thought it would be nice to bring you here. You like to experience new stuff, don’t you?”

Eleven just stared at him, without knowing what to say.

“Listen,” Sean began again, a bit nervous, “I know you, Eleven. I know you wouldn’t like me to ask you out in a place like this. It’s a very romantic place –“ He looked around, checking all the couples –“But... it’s just dinner. No big surprise at the end. Okay?”

Eleven started nodding slowly.

“But...” Sean’s lips curled into a nervous kind of smile that Eleven knew he had wanted it to come off as a smirk. “You would be fine if I asked you to be my girlfriend?”

Eleven blinked, surprised with the question, and then chuckled. She looked down at the steak and tomato rice she had ordered. It smelled divine.

“I’m not answering that, Sean,” she replied. “Because then you’d be asking me to be your girlfriend in a cliché scenario, and we don’t want that, do we now?”

Sean’s nervous smile turned into a bright, happy one. He coughed, his eyes showing how he was finding her words so unbelievable, and then nodded.

“Yes, you are right. Some other time, then.”

“Some other time,” Eleven agreed.

After dinner, Sean took her back to the dorms. He left a kiss on her cheek and she pecked his lips quickly. They parted with a promise to see each other soon.

Eleven took her time walking back to her room's floor. Instead of taking the lift, she climbed the stairs. She lived on the fourth floor, but that was okay. She wanted some time on her own before meeting up with Max.

Was she really going to do it? Was she ready for a fully committed relationship? Eleven didn't even know how it was like to date someone. She knew the theory, the basic rules for it, but.... The reality of it? She had no idea.

What if she was a controlling jealous girlfriend? What if she just didn't care enough and Sean got hurt by it? What if she didn't match up to his expectations and he realized he had wasted months on her?

Change was a bitch. She hated it.

She hated feeling insecure because she couldn't control what was still going to happen.

Eleven opened her bedroom's door, ready to be attacked by Max's questions. Yet, the place was empty.

Frowning, Eleven texted her best friend.

Max was with Lucas. She wouldn't be home tonight. Great. Eleven was alone with her thoughts.

Her phone started to ring. She looked down and saw Mike's name.

"Hey."

"El!" Mike exclaimed, excited. "Oh my, El. It's happened!"

Eleven wrinkled her eyebrows.

"What has happened?" She asked as she approached her desk and noticed Max had moved some books around.

"I'm dating Tina."

Everything stopped. Her hands trembled.

“What? I-I didn’t know you were seeing her tonight.”

“Oh, she showed up here. We had dinner and all, and-“

“You asked her out?” Eleven interrupted him. Her throat was dry.

“No. She asked me, actually,” Mike chuckled. “She was like, well, let’s make this happen, and I went, sure. Man, I’m dating Tina. Finally.”

Finally.

Mike was officially in a relationship.

Eleven had to sit down. The desk’s chair rolled a bit and she almost fell, but everything was cool, she held on to the desk.

She had to say something now, didn’t she? She had to be Mike’s best friend, happy for him and all that shit.

“I’m happy for you, Mike,” Eleven said, keeping her voice controlled.

Was this the moment they should talk about it? About their unspoken arrangement of three years?

No. Just like she had said to Max, there was no need. They both knew that no more friends-with-benefits kind of stuff could happen from now on. Mike was with Tina and, soon, she would be with Sean.

“Thanks!” Mike chuckled. “How about you? I heard you went on date with Sean tonight.”

Eleven frowned. How the fuck did he hear that?

“It went fine. He’s amazing. Really, really amazing.”

There was a small pause.

“You really like him, huh?”

“Yeah,” Eleven answered with honesty. “I really do, Michael.”

“That’s good,” Mike’s voice came out weaker than he wanted. He

cleared his throat. “Anyways, do you want to catch up this weekend? Re-watch some old horror films? Dustin wants to do something crazy before classes begin, but refuses to go out with Ceci. Like, one time the girl gets too drunk and is refusing to watch her drink again.”

Eleven chuckled softly.

“Well, she did get pretty hammered the last time, Mike.”

“Yeah, but it happens, and she says she wants to go out, but Dustin is all like ‘Uuuh, no, babe, not gonna happen’,” Mike said in a hoarse voice that sounded nothing like Dustin.

“Dude,” Eleven snorted, “that sounds nothing like Dustin.”

“I’m trying my best here, El. Don’t hurt me like this.”

Yeah, I could ask you the same, but too late now, isn’t it?

Eleven blinked, feeling confused with her own thoughts.

“Well, any-“

“I gotta go, Mike.”

Eleven hung up and threw her phone to the other side of the room. It ended on Max’s bed.

Eleven pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms around them. She pressed her forehead against her knees and bit her own skin, screaming against it.

What was happening?

What...

...was...

...happening?

Tears started crumbling down her face and sobs were hoarding in throat, demanding to leave, but getting stuck like a stupid jammed traffic.

She hated change. She always knew she hated it and she had already been over that thought the last past few weeks.

But more than that, she hated how she felt disgusted with herself for being like this over Mike's happiness. He deserved to be happy. So, who was she to be crying in her dorms all by herself? She had no right. Because no one had any right to somebody else's heart.

Eleven looked up, shocked with her own thoughts again.

She did *not* want Mike's heart. Not three years ago, not now, not ever. They were friends. Just friends.

But it hurts. Why does it hurt so much?

Standing up, she crossed the room and grabbed her phone. She called Max.

"Hey, El. What's up?"

Her friend sounded so happy.

"I'm sorry," Eleven sobbed, feeling like shit for ruining Max's good evening.

"Are you crying?" She heard movement on the other side of the phone. "El, what's wrong?"

"Can you please come home? I'm sorry."

"Yes, yes, of course. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

As promised, Max was there in twenty minutes.

Eleven had sat down on her bed, back against the wall, and her eyes closed, silent tears coming down her face.

She just wanted it to go away.

"El, what's happened?" Max asked, sitting down next to her and grabbing her hands.

"I-" Eleven sniffed. "I can't be alone with my thoughts anymore,

Max.”

Max blinked, confused.

“What?”

“I don’t want to be alone in here,” and she pointed to her head. “I don’t. It’s... It’s confusing.”

Max didn’t seem to understand what was happening.

“Did something go wrong with your date?”

Eleven shook her head.

Sean was good.

“Sean is great,” Eleven said and sobbed quietly. “It’s me. I’m the problem.” She couldn’t control her thoughts; she couldn’t understand them.

“Oh, El,” Max sighed and pulled her to a hug.

They remained like that all night, sleeping in the same bed.

Thank God she had Max.

September, 9th. Saturday. 22:43

Sean had asked her to be his girlfriend two days ago. They had been taking a stroll through the city, with no particular direction to follow, talking about their summer, their expectations for the new school year, their favourite TV shows and films. Sean had stopped her in front of a bookshop, stared at her nervously, which gave away all his intentions, and kissed her. Then, he had asked her out.

Eleven had smiled and said yes, feeling utterly happy. (Really, she did. She was really happy that Sean actually liked *her* so much that he asked her out.)

She told everyone about it, texting Max, Dustin and Mike right away.

She sent the same message to the three, making no distinction in how they got the news. All of them seemed happy for her and Sean. But that's the thing about messages: you can't really know what the other person was thinking when they wrote it.

Ceci invited them all – pretty much, begged Dustin - for a party on the Saturday before classes began. Eleven got the invitation through Mike, who called her and then gave the phone to Ceci after she confirmed she would be going to the party. Then, she invited Max, Lucas and Sean to come along. It would be fun that way.

The party was at a Ceci's classmate's house. His parents were out of the weekend (Eleven could never understand how anyone had the guts to throw a party in their childhood home. You could never, ever, trust drunk people to behave.) and he had this really huge house by the river- They could arrive any time they wanted from nine to midnight and there was free booze for everyone, but if you brought your own, it would be safer.

"You're drunk?" Sean asked.

Eleven, who was taking a long sip from her bottle of wine, made a thumbs-up signal. Sean snorted and shook his head. He looked at the watch on his right wrist.

"It's like eleven pm."

Eleven put down the bottle and grabbed Sean's hand. They were on their way, on foot, to the party. Max and Lucas were behind them, arguing quietly about something that neither Sean nor Eleven wanted to get into.

"It's the best hour to get drunk, trust me."

Sean shrugged.

"I prefer to start drinking later, you know? If I drink too early, I'll go to bed at three or four am."

Eleven was about to say, '*but that's the idea,*' when she suddenly realized that all her drinking process had to do with Mike. She and Mike always got drunk super early and, around three or four am,

they would leave and go home to sleep with each other.

Eleven stopped still, pulling Sean back by his hand. He looked at her, concerned.

“Are you okay?”

Why did her life revolve around Mike? Why couldn't she just have one thing – really, just one thing – that hadn't to do with Mike or their stupid fucking sex buddies arrangement?

Why did it still hurt?

Wasn't she supposed to be happy?

“El?”

It was Max who woke her up from her thoughts. She turned around, saw her best friend staring at her with a worried look, and Lucas, a few meters away, looking away, upset. Their fight wasn't going well.

“I'm okay,” Eleven smiled, raising her arms in the air and shaking the bottle of wine. “Super fuckin' okay! Let's go party!”

Unconsciously, she looked for Mike as soon as they stepped in the house. But the only person she saw was Dustin, sitting in the kitchen, watching a group of people play beer-pong.

“Dustiin!” She sung and hugged the boy from behind.

Dustin chuckled, nursing a beer.

“Hey, El. Do you want to play beer-pong with me?”

Eleven wrinkled her nose in a clear no.

“No one wants to play with me, man,” Dustin complained.

“What about Ceci?”

“She isn't drinking,” Dustin said in a stern tone.

Eleven raised an eyebrow. By her side, Sean seemed surprised as

well, even though he did not know Dustin.

“Are you guys okay?”

“Yes.”

Of course, they weren't. It was a party and Dustin hated himself now whenever Ceci drank.

“Hey, I'm Sean,” Sean decided to introduce himself, holding out a hand.

Eleven smiled at him, thankful that Sean intervene.

“Dustin.” Her friend shook her boyfriend's hand. “Nice to finally meet you, Sean. Do you want to play beer-pong with me?”

“Ah,... sure?” Sean said, looking at Eleven almost as if he were looking for approval.

She nodded.

“Really?” Dustin's eyes brightened up.

“Yeah, really,” Sean said, more confident.

Dustin stood up, thrilled, and sent away one of the team's playing.

When the guys started to complain, Dustin turned to them and said, “You guys have been delaying the change of teams because no one wanted to play, so fuck off. It's my and –“he grabbed Sean, patting his back –“ my friend Sean's turn now.”

Sean beamed in happiness, looking at Eleven like a little kid who had got the perfect present in his birthday.

Eleven gave him two thumbs-up, a huge smile on her lips and her eyesight dizzy, and then said a loud goodbye, going off to explore the living-room where she could hear music coming from.

She was singing along to *Nobody to Love* by Sigma when someone screamed her name excitedly.

She looked around, confused, and saw Ceci coming down the stairs, holding a beer in her hand. They hugged.

“Oh, I haven’t seen you in ages!” The drunk girl screamed in her ear.

Eleven patted her back, laughing.

“I’ve missed you, Ceci!” She exclaimed.

They pulled back and Ceci grabbed her face, the cold glass of the bottle touching Eleven’s chin.

“How have you been?”

“Fantastic! I got a boyfriend!”

Ceci’s mouth fell open.

“You too?!” She stepped away from her. “My life is a lie!”

Eleven frowned, confused.

“What?”

Ceci pointed a finger at her with the hand that was holding the beer.

“I was so sure, El, so sure that you and Mike were in love with each other! I mean, it really looked like it! But now he is dating this girl called Tina, and you have a boyfriend! I mean-“ Ceci let out a surprise sound, holding her hands up almost like in surrender, “I have no idea what to think!”

Eleven’s head was too drunk to come up with a clear, rational answer. She could have snorted and said, *of course we aren’t in love, we never were!*, but she just stood still, staring at Ceci, who went off to talk about Dustin and how he was upset with her for coming to this party.

“And I’m like, it’s my choice, right? My choice. I decide to get drunk, like he decides to get drunk and-“

“Heeey!” A girl, who Eleven had no idea who she was, showed up,

wrapping an arm around Ceci. "Hello girl!"

"Oh, heey you!"

Eleven took the opportunity to escape and hid inside the crazy jungle that was the living-room.

Drake's *Hotline Bling* was playing and couples were rubbing on each other. Eleven made a face at two girls who were clearly putting a show for everyone to see.

Eleven stood still in the middle of the improvised dance floor. Well, she wanted to dance. But she didn't know anyone (and wasn't going to meet new people so she could dance drunk for a couple of minutes and then leave because she was bored) and dancing alone wasn't her thing.

A hand suddenly touched her back. She turned around, ready to hit whoever had touched her, but stopped still.

"El," Mike smiled, his pupils dilated and his smile so wide that she just knew he was as drunk as she.

"Mike!" She threw her arms around him, pulling him to a hug. "Ugh, I miss you," she confessed. And she only did it because she was drunk.

"Dance with me?" Mike asked, looking her in the eyes.

"Only if we sing too," she answered.

Mike winked at her playfully.

They knew the song by heart. Too many nights spent high in front of YouTube listening to the hits from every year since the 90s led to them know pretty much all popular songs that existed.

They did the phone gesture to each other as Drake sung about it, moving their heads to the beat.

When the song ended, there was a dead moment in which Eleven took the opportunity to ask, "Where's Tina?", in Mike's ear.

He shrugged.

“Somewhere with her classmates,” he answered, his lips so close to her ear that made her shiver.

A new song came on. They didn’t recognize it, but try to dance to it for a bit.

But it was just awful, wasn’t it? To dance to a song that you never heard before? At some point, your mind tries to pretend it recognizes it and makes you sing along, but you just make some lyrics up in the end.

“Ugh,” Mike let out, stopping still. “I hate it when they play stupid songs no one knows.”

But, around them, a lot of people were singing along correctly.

“I need to pee,” Eleven suddenly stated.

Mike looked at her. She batted her eyes and pouted.

“Pretty please?”

Mike sighed and grabbed her hand, helping her get out of the messy crowd.

When they got to the stairs, Mike suddenly stopped and let go of her. Eleven frowned until she saw Tina talking to a couple of girls. Mike walked up to her, said something in her ear and she looked over at Eleven. She smiled at her.

Tina just freaking smiled at her.

Of course, Eleven faked a smile back.

Mike left a quick kiss on Tina’s cheek and came back to Eleven. Motioning with his head to the stairs, they climbed up.

“Shit,” Mike muttered, seeing the five-people line to the bathroom.

“Wait with me,” Eleven begged, grabbing his arm.

Mike leaned against the white wall, accidentally knocking a framed photo down. He didn't look behind to see the damage.

"Of course."

Eleven smiled happily, leaned against him, her head on his chest, and Mike raised his hand to play with her hair, just like he always did.

Eleven took a deep breath, enjoying the closeness between the two of them. She didn't even remember the last time she had seen Mike. They only texted each other, one always forgetting to answer the other at some point. It was sad, really. They were friends.

The line moved a bit and Mike dragged Eleven forwards, holding her by her arms. She tilted her head up and giggled at him. Mike touched her nose with his finger.

"Cute," he muttered.

Eleven laid her head against his chest again.

The line kept moving slowly. Eleven was pressing her hips together, keeping her bladder in control as much as she could. But it was awful. So awful. She needed to pee so badly.

"Here," a random guy opened the bathroom door and got out, letting it free for Mike and Eleven to enter.

"Thanks," Mike said and closed the door fast as Eleven was already halfway of undoing her jeans.

He kept his back to her the entire time.

"Oh Thank God," Eleven moaned as soon as she started peeing.

Mike chuckled softly.

Eleven did pee for a while. Then, she looked for toilet paper, cleaned herself up and flushed the toilet. She pulled her jeans up, having some difficulty getting them through the thighs.

"Ugh, I hate these skinny jeans," she muttered.

Mike peeked behind his shoulder. Seeing the coast clear, he turned around.

“You always complain about them, but you keep wearing them.”

“They make my ass look cute,” Eleven stated. She moved to wash her hands.

“That’s true,” Mike agreed.

Eleven smirked at him.

Out of blue, Mike closed the short distance between them and hugged Eleven, laying his head on her shoulder.

“Mike,” Eleven called, her wet hands hanging on the air.

“I miss you,” Mike muttered, looking at her through the mirror.

“Mike,” she whispered, closing her dizzy eyes for a second. Her hand touched his cheek, feeling its warmth for the first time in weeks.

“I miss you,” he repeated.

“I miss you too.”

And suddenly they were kissing.

Their tongues danced a battle they already knew, frantic, passionate, with little space for breathing. Their hands were everywhere, Mike pushing Eleven against the bathroom’s door.

They started undoing each other’s belts, unbuttoning jeans. They moaned together as they shoved their hands inside each other’s underwear, their fingers touching their most sensitive parts.

They were barely kissing each other, rather breathing and moaning into each other’s mouths, their movements frantic and desperate.

Eleven half-opened her eyes, finding Mike staring at her, his pupils dilated as much as hers. They leaned in for a kiss, their tongues meeting in a sloppy battle.

She couldn't explain what she was feeling. It was more than lust, more than drunk wishes, more than sexual frustration. Feeling Mike's lips, feeling his hands on her, hearing his moans and heavy breathing, ... it made her feel... timeless. Like, if she had to be stuck in a moment, it would be this one.

It would be any moment that she was with Mike. Always.

There was a sudden bang against the door behind them.

They pulled apart.

"I NEED TO PISS!" A guy shouted.

Mike and Eleven looked at each other, both coming to the realization that something was wrong.

Tina.

Sean.

They pulled away from each other, buttoned their jeans and did their belts. Eleven pushed Mike out of the way, looked at herself in the mirror.

"COME ON!" The guy yelled again.

Eleven and Mike shared a quick look, feeling ashamed and shy. Mike opened the door, pushed the guy that had been screaming out of the way and let Eleven come out. They started walking away.

"If you want to have sex, go home for that, idiots!" The guy said to them.

Mike almost turned around, but Eleven stopped him.

"No, it's fine," she whispered.

Mike looked at her, at the hand she had on his arm and then shook it away. He climbed down the stairs fast and went to meet up with Tina. He went to pretend everything was normal; whatever had happened in the bathroom hadn't been real.

Eleven stared at the couple; how Tina hugged Mike by wrapping her arms around his waist, and he laid his head on her head in a pretend happiness.

Tears gathered in her eyes, and there was a sob stuck in her throat, demanding to get out.

Eleven climbed down the stairs and, without looking twice, she left the house, ready to go home all by herself.

By luck – or maybe not -, she met Max, standing in the middle of the street, looking at the empty road ahead of her.

“Max,” Eleven called as she joined the girl. She grabbed her hands and tried to make her friend look at her. “Are you okay?”

Max shook her head.

“What’s wrong?”

Max sobbed. Eleven hugged her.

“Let’s go home,” Max muttered in a pleading tone.

Eleven nodded.

“Of course, baby. Let’s home.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make my day!

8. Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm sorry I didn't reply to your comments! They meant the world to me, but college has begun and everything's a mess in life.

September, 19th. Tuesday. 13:54

Sitting on his bed, with his back against the wall, Mike was staring at his cell phone, almost like he was waiting for something. Well, he was. He had texted Eleven two days ago and had yet received a reply. He had tried to hang out with her, like he had done in the past few weeks, but had got no feedback. And it hurt to stare at the unanswered message, seeing that, above that one, there was another one that had got no reply as well.

They weren't like that. They always answered each other.

Was it stupid that he felt something was really wrong? That, somewhere, along their friendship, something had gone completely wrong and now they were here, falling apart?

They were going to be friends forever. For the rest of their lives. They had promised that to each other so many times - and yeah, a part of Mike would die of embarrassment if someone found out he went around for five years spreading these kind of lame promises to his best friend, but it didn't mean that he hadn't been honest. He had. And now, here they were, sending each other messages that were left unanswered. Why? What had happened?

Mike raised his eyes to look at the wall behind his bed. There was a Star Wars calendar over the night table, next to a bunch of photos that he and Eleven - of course, it had been the two of them - had glued together, finding nice spots for each one of them. There were drawings and stupid quotes written on white papers as well. A lot of them had to do with Eleven, some with Dustin and one or two with his younger sister. That wall was pretty much his all life. Or, at least, it represented everyone who meant something for him: an old photo

of him with his two sisters hung above all pictures, next to one of him and his mother, five lined photos of him and Eleven embodied each year of their friendship, photos of him and Dustin since they were kids until now, photos of them in events, festivals, parties.... Hell, there was even one of Eleven's friend, Max, at a party they had all gone to in their first year of college.

He suddenly realized there was no picture of Tina. They hadn't had taken one. At least, not with his cell phone. Tina had a bunch of photos of them in her phone.

Did that make him a bad boyfriend? Not having a picture of his girlfriend in his cell phone?

"Knock, knock." A woman's voice said.

Mike's eyes flicked to the door. Seeing Tina standing by his bedroom's entrance, he smiled and hid his phone inside his sweater' pocket.

"Hey you."

"I hope you don't mind," Tina said, closing the door behind her, "Dustin let me in."

"It's fine."

Tina dropped her purse and took off her sneakers before jumping on to the bed and sitting down next to Mike. She leaned in to kiss his cheek.

"What's up?"

"Nothing."

Tina raised an eyebrow. Mike chuckled and dropped an arm around her.

"I mean it. Nothing. What's up with you?"

"Well, I have this awful group project to work on." Mike made a face at that. She nodded, knowing he was feeling her pain. "I ended up

with two assholes – a girl and a boy – and this nice guy who is actually wanting to work on the project, but he works, so he barely has time. The other two are just.... Ugh.”

“They don’t help, right?”

“Right!” Tina exclaimed and laid her head on Mike’s shoulder. “I hate group projects.”

“I know the feeling.”

Tina rolled her eyes.

“You barely have group projects in your classes.”

“And it’s a good life.”

Tina pulled away and changed her sitting position so that she could look at Mike.

“Why are you like this?” She asked teasingly.

Mike frowned, confused.

“Like what?”

“Like an idiot.”

Mike touched his heart, pretending to be offended.

“How dare you? I was going to get us ice-cream, but now-“

“Oh, no!” Tina threw herself onto him. Mike laughed. “Pretty please. Get us ice-cream.”

Mike rolled his eyes, kissed her forehead and then moved her away from him so he could stand up.

“I’ll be right back.”

Dustin was in the kitchen, multitasking between studying and arguing with Ceci over text messages.

“Still fighting?” Mike asked, opening the top shelf of the fridge and looking for the chocolate ice-cream he had bought a few days ago. He had bought it for him and Eleven.

Suddenly reminded of his best friend, Mike took out his cell phone so he could check for the hundredth time that the message he had sent her two days ago was still unanswered. He sighed, shoved it in his pocket again and went to grab two spoons.

“Dustin,” he called once he realized his friend hadn’t replied.

“Huh?”

“Are you two still fighting?”

“Yup,” Dustin muttered and threw his phone over the wooden table, almost making it drop to the floor. “She doesn’t get it, man.”

“And you don’t get it either,” Mike replied, patted his friend’s back and left him alone in the kitchen.

Dustin wanted so badly to be a good boyfriend that he was turning into a, well, kind of bad one. Ceci was her own person, so, yes, she was going to make some mistakes once in a while (after all, who didn’t?) and Dustin would have to be there to clean them up, or to be a shoulder for her to cry on. But he couldn’t prevent her from doing something just because it went wrong once.

When Mike got to his bedroom, Tina was on her knees on the bed, checking the photographs on his wall. He closed the door softly, trying not to make a sound, yet she heard him and looked behind. Her eyebrows were wrinkled together.

“Can I ask you something?”

Mike stopped still.

“Of course.”

Tina moved out of the bed and stood up, facing Mike.

“Did you and your friend Eleven ever.... have a thing?”

For a second, Mike's heart froze.

For a second, Mike saw Eleven laying on his bed, smiling at him.

For a second, Mike felt Eleven's lips on his skin.

For a second, he wished Eleven had replied to his text message and was here right now, hanging out with him.

"What? No!" Mike acted out surprised and shook his head. "Of course not. We are friends. Best friends. You know that."

Tina seemed insecure. She bit her bottom lip, looked behind her shoulder to the pictures on his wall (pictures that he looked at every day so he could see Eleven's smile), and finally nodded, accepting his words.

"I'm sorry," she muttered and stepped closer to him. She touched his arms gently. "It's just... I don't know how it is like to be so close to a guy as a friend, so... It just... I might be seeing things where they don't exist, you know? Because I never had that... You know what I mean, right?"

Mike sighed and nodded. He leaned down to kiss her forehead.

"Don't worry. I get it."

Tina smiled softly at him. Her eyes dropped to the ice-cream in his hands and the spoons. She frowned.

"No bowls?"

Mike raised an eyebrow.

"We need bowls?"

"Well, of course."

Tina left the room.

Mike felt confused.

Why would they need bowls?

September, 23rd. Saturday. 15:44

Eleven and Max went for a walk in the mall, after having decided they deserved a two-hour break from the essays that they already had to start working on. Eleven had to do a bunch of research that she didn't feel like doing and Max had to read these two huge books that had cost her an arm and a leg.

The walk to the mall was a quiet one, both feeling tired and too deep into their own thoughts to remember to make small chat with one another. The two felt they were walking on thin ice; not with each other, of course, but in life. Eleven had already realized that she couldn't bear to be alone with her thoughts; everything was great until she found herself alone, thinking about every little shit that was happening in her life; and something was clearly upsetting her best friend, who sometimes refused to take her boyfriend's calls or talk to people.

Eleven wanted to try and be a better friend, ask her what was wrong, but she was just so scared; scared that Max was hurting and she couldn't help her feel better. Nevertheless, she shopped with Max and helped her pick some t-shirts and jeans. Something that cleared both girls' minds.

"I think we should ask to change floors next year," Max suddenly said.

Eleven blinked, confused.

"Why?"

"I'm tired of living on the fourth floor. I want to go to the second or first."

Eleven stared at Max for a few seconds before she snorted and laughed.

"You're so lazy, Max."

Max rolled her eyes and threw her red hair behind her shoulder.

“Well, you say that, but you know you agree. I mean, yeah, we have elevators, but... it always feels like forever to reach the fourth floor.”

“You’re lazy,” Eleven repeated.

When reaching the food court, Max sat down on the first vacant table she found. Eleven took the seat in front of her. Their purses and shopping bags occupied the empty chairs next to them.

“God, I need food,” Max moaned and looked around, trying to see what she was in the mood for. Did she feel like eating pizza or a burger? “Do you think it’s bad if I eat pasta in the middle of the afternoon?”

Eleven shrugged. Max sighed.

“You don’t help me at all, Ellie,” she complained and kept on searching for something to eat.

Eleven gazed at her best friend with soft eyes. Max was a good person all the time. Yeah, she could be harsh sometimes, and cold, refusing hugs and sweet praises, but she was good. She never had bad intentions and was always honest with others. Even when it sucked, when it would make her look back, Max was sincere.

Everyone had their secrets, but it was better when they were out than when they were consuming you from the inside. If you had someone you could trust those secrets, why not say them out loud? Why not confess them?

“I miss Mike,” Eleven admitted out loud.

Max looked at her, her eyes wide-opened. Eleven faked a half-smile, trying to put up a strong front. Yeah, she missed him. So what? What could people do to her for that?

“It’s normal to miss him,” Max observed, sitting straight. “You guys are friends. You barely hang out nowadays, so yeah, you’re going to miss him.”

Eleven sighed.

“Yeah, but...” She gulped. “Sometimes I think I miss him more than I like being with Sean.”

Max didn't say anything.

“Please say something,” Eleven asked.

“Mike has been your friend for five years, Ellie,” Max stated. “Sean has been your boyfriend for weeks. I know you're scared of ... feeling something when you're with Mike, but you're also depriving yourself from being with your friend.”

She was scared of feeling something when she was with Mike? Eleven half-smiled at those words. It was a sad smile, a smile that clearly said *yeah, I know what you're trying to say, but we're both going to ignore the truth because that's for the best.*

“Maybe we can hang out all together?” Max suggested.

“Do you think that's a clever idea?” Eleven asked, worried. Getting a bunch of people, including Mike, Tina, Sean and her in the same place seemed like an awful thing to do. Not for Tina or Sean, no, but for Mike and Eleven. They were friends, sure, but...not just friends.

Nowadays, Eleven wasn't even sure what they were.

Max smiled, leaned over to open her purse and take out her cell phone. She spent a few minutes writing something on it and Eleven stared at her waiting. In the end, when Max put down her phone, Eleven's phone beeped from inside her coat's pocket.

Max light of life

Hey guuuuys! Let's all hang out next Saturday?! El and I would offer our place, but we live in a dorm, so.... Anyone available to offer shelter to a bunch of cool people? Aka Max, El and plus one, Lucas, Dustin and plus one, Mike and plus one and Will. You guys in? xxx

Eleven looked over at Max who was smiling very proudly of herself,

tapping a finger on her cheek and pretending to look away as if she didn't know her friend wasn't staring at her.

Eleven shook her head, smiling.

"You're unbelievable."

Max's smile went softer.

"It's going to make you feel better, you'll see."

Eleven sighed.

"If you say so..."

"You'll believe in me?" Max tried to finish her sentence.

Eleven snorted and shrugged. "Sure, whatever makes you feel better too, Maxie."

They ended up eating burgers and sharing a bottle of water. When they were done, they grabbed all their bags and left. They had to go back to their essays, researching and writing, at least, a few lines. Truly a lovely way of spending a Saturday afternoon and evening.

"Wait." Max stopped and shoved her hand inside her jeans' back pocket. She took her phone out and read something. "Oh, Dustin confirmed his and Ceci's presence. So did Will."

"Nice," Eleven commented, clicking on the elevator's button. "And Lucas?"

The elevator doors opened and they walked in, relieved that they were alone (sharing an elevator with strangers was always a bummer, for some reason).

"He hasn't replied," Max said, a bit too cold.

Eleven glanced at her friend, worried. Had she and Lucas fought again?

Jesus, why did it feel like love around her was slowly dying? Dustin

and Ceci kept fighting as well, now Lucas and Max... She and Mike-

No. She and Mike were nothing romantic. Love wasn't dying there; it simply didn't exist.

The elevator stopped and the doors opened one floor above the one they had clicked on. A woman with a baby carriage walked in, smiling apologetically to the two young girls. Eleven stepped away, even helping the lady to push the carriage inside. She smiled softly at the baby, who gawked at her with his eyes wide-opened.

When Eleven turned to look at her best friend, she found her frozen in the spot, staring at the baby with fear in her eyes, her hands gripping the bags tightly. Eleven frowned, confused, since she didn't remember Max having any kind of fear when it came to babies. She knew this girl in one of her classes that simply hated children, almost like it was a phobia, but Max wasn't like that... Max always smiled to little kids.

The elevator stopped again. The lady got out first, pulling the baby carriage carefully. The baby waved goodbye at the two girls before his mother turned around and left in a hurry.

Eleven grabbed Max's arm and pushed her out of the elevator before the doors closed. They stopped outside of it.

"Are you okay?" Eleven asked her best friend.

Max took a deep, shaken breath.

"Max," Eleven stepped closer.

A tear escaped from Max's eye.

"N-no."

"What's wrong?" Eleven asked, quickly checking the surroundings. She didn't want anyone to see Max like this. She knew how Max got sensitive over people seeing her cry. She looked back at her best friend. "What's wrong, Maxie?" She repeated softly.

"I... I think I'm pregnant, El."

Eleven's mouth fell open.

"W-what? Max-" Eleven didn't know what to say. "Are you sure?"

Max shook her head and cleaned the tears in her face.

"No. I'm too scared to take the test."

"But you should," Eleven said and lowered her hand so she could grab her friend's. "Come on. We'll do it together."

Max sobbed quietly.

"I can't. I-"

"Max."

Max sobbed again and looked at Eleven.

"You have to know or the uncertainty will kill you."

Eleven didn't know where those words had come from, but they had the right kind of effect on Max and, if she were completely honest, on her too.

It took them twenty minutes to get to a drugstore and then buy a pregnancy test. Eleven bought it for Max, who was so ashamed of the entire situation she couldn't even bear the idea of been seeing with a pregnancy test. Then, they took the bus back to the dorms. They walked up the four flights of stairs since the elevator was taking too long to arrive, dropped the bags on their room and then took a quick journey to the bathroom.

Max didn't have any problems in peeing in front of Eleven, she had done it a dozen times, whether sober or drunk, but today she was too nervous to do it.

"Do you want some water?" Eleven asked, sitting on the marble floor.

Max shook her head. She closed her eyes, one hand shoved between her legs, and took a deep breath.

“I can do it.”

After a bit, Eleven heard the sound of something hitting the toilet’s water.

“How long?” Max asked after she pulled her pants up and set the pregnancy test on the floor.

Eleven read the instructions.

“Five minutes.”

Max sighed and took a seat next to her friend. Eleven wrapped an arm around hers and gave her a reassuring smile. Max didn’t react.

“It’s going to be okay.”

“What if I’m pregnant, El?”

“You have options.”

Max closed her eyes again and leaned her head back on the wall.

“I can’t get rid of it.”

“Max,” Eleven whispered.

Max opened her eyes and looked at Eleven.

“My mom was in the same position I am right now, Ellie. And she chose to keep me.”

Eleven pressed her lips together. She wasn’t going to be the one reminding Max that her mother had been the one to choose to leave her too.

“I know she left me,” Max continued. “But... I’m happy I’m alive.”

“Max,” Eleven squeezed her friend’s arm. “Let’s take it step by step, okay? First, we’ll wait for the results. Then, you talk to Lucas-“

“No.”

“Max!”

Max’s green eyes turned to Eleven, angry.

“I don’t want him to know.”

“He’s the father!”

Max shook her head.

“He isn’t?” Eleven asked, confused.

Max let out an offended sound.

“He is! I just don’t want him knowing!”

“Well, he has to, eventually.”

“I don’t want to talk about it now.”

Eleven sighed, frustrated.

They remained in silence the rest of the time. When the five minutes were up, Eleven nudged Max’s arm. The redhaired girl looked at her nervously before leaning forwards and grabbing the pregnancy test.

“On three?” Eleven asked.

Max nodded. Her hand trembled.

“Hey,” Eleven said softly. Max looked at her. “No matter what, I’m here for you.”

Max managed to half-smile at those words.

“Thank you, Ellie.”

Eleven leaned down to kiss her shoulder.

Then, they counted together, “One, two, ...three,” and looked at the test.

It was positive.

September, 30th. Saturday. 20:12

"Thank you," Lucas said with a polite smile as he accepted the five extra-large pizzas from the delivery boy. He looked behind his shoulder and shouted, "DUSTIN, COME AND PAY, MAN."

Dustin showed up, complaining under his breath.

"You guys better pay me back right away." He gave the money to the delivery boy. "Keep the change, man."

"Thanks," the delivery boy said, his lips curled into a polite smile.

"You complain about money and then don't ask for the change?" Lucas asked in a teasing voice after they closed the door.

"I'm a nice person. Bite me, Sinclair."

Lucas and Dustin barely knew each other, having hung out just a couple of times, but they got along very well. Their personalities, despite different, matched.

"Sometimes I think they are old friends," Eleven commented with Max, who was watching her boyfriend and ex-sex buddy hand out pizza boxes to everyone.

They were at Mike and Dustin's flat, having Mike volunteered their place to host Max's fun and friendly gathering. Right now, Mike was sitting on the floor next to his girlfriend, who, in her turn, was making small chat with Ceci, who was on the sofa, next to Will and Lucas. Eleven and Max were sharing an armchair, Eleven being used as a human shield between the couple. Lucas, now sitting down on his place, glanced at his girlfriend quickly, something he had been doing all evening.

"You guys should talk," Eleven murmured in Max's ear.

Max shook her head, keeping her head down and biting her nail.

"Are we going to get drunk tonight?" Ceci asked out of blue. Next to

her, Dustin scowled quietly.

“Hum,” Mike let out, “does anyone have alcohol?”

Everyone shook their head in a quiet no.

“Then, no,” he answered, looking at Ceci.

“We can watch movies,” Tina suggested. Mike smiled at her. “What? It’s a good idea.”

“It is,” Mike agreed with a soft look.

Eleven bit the inside of her mouth, keeping herself together. Why did it look like Tina had it all? Looks and personality. She was tall, had a facial bone structure that many people would die for, and a friendly smile. She was nice to anyone she met and tried to make them feel comfortable in her presence.

“Is Sean coming, El?” Mike suddenly asked, his eyes on her.

Eleven checked her phone. Sean had yet replied to her text message.

“I don’t know. He had a house meeting.”

“House meeting?” Will asked, confused. “So soon?”

“Well, yeah, they have new people in the flat.”

Will nodded, understanding.

“Here,” Lucas said, catching Eleven’s attention. He had one of the gigantic pizza boxes opened in his hands and was putting it in display for her and Max. “Take a slice.”

“Thanks, Lucas.”

Lucas smiled softly at her as she took a slice of pizza and passed it to Max. Max, who not once looked at her boyfriend. When Eleven took a slice of pizza to herself, her eyes met Lucas’ and she saw agony in them.

Max had to tell him.

“We could always play a game,” Ceci blurted loud enough so that everyone heard. “So we can spend the time until Sean arrives? I mean, it would be mean to start watching movies before he was here, right?”

Everyone agreed. Eleven frowned, looking at her slice of pizza like it was the most interesting thing in the world. Group games were fun if you weren’t hiding something from, at least, two participants.

Next to her, Max didn’t seem to be keen on playing a game either.

“What game can we play?” Dustin asked, his eyes looking at Ceci in adoration.

Please, no one say anything cliché like Truth or Dare or spin the bottle or-

“We can do a circle of sincerity,” Tina suggested. “It’s like Truth or Dare, but no dare.”

Eleven closed her eyes. Fuck.

“What if people don’t want to answer?” Lucas questioned in a tone of voice that clearly showed that he found the game ridiculous.

“Nothing happens,” Tina said with a quick shrug. She had turned her body and was now playing with Mike’s hair. Eleven wanted to make her hand explode. “But all of us here will know that someone is hiding something from someone.”

There was a quiet moment in the living-room.

“That’s evil,” Will commented.

The crowd offered a tense chuckle, agreeing.

For a second, Eleven thought they would refuse to play that stupid game of sincerity. She looked over at Max, who was licking the tips of her fingers, her slice of pizza completely gone.

“Who wants to start?” Dustin asked. He clearly wanted to make peace with his girlfriend.

"I can go," Ceci said, sitting up straight. She looked around the room, tapping her lips, thoughtful, as she chose her victim.

"Wait," Mike stopped. Eleven looked at him with hope. "What are the rules?"

"You ask someone a question. If they answer, they get to ask someone else. If they don't, the person that first asked can ask someone else a question," Tina explained, her finger stroking Mike's chin.

Mike's chin was so sharp and so soft at the same time. Eleven missed it. She missed cuddling with him in bed, kissing his chin and teasing him. She missed it so badly.

"Eleven."

Eleven blinked. She looked at Ceci, confused.

"My first question is for you."

Well, fuck.

"Have you and Sean had sex?" Ceci asked.

Eleven made a confused face, looking around the living-room.

"Well, no."

"Really?"

"Yeah," Eleven answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Is it my turn now?" Someone nodded. "Good. Will."

"Oh boy," Will muttered.

"How's life?" She asked.

Will looked at her, confused. Next to her, Max snorted.

"It's fine?"

"Good. I'm happy for you."

Eleven was making it very clear that she hated the game. On the other side of the room, Mike was trying to catch her attention, trying to understand what the hell she was doing. But the game kept going and Eleven didn't look at him. She refused to even listen to other people's questions and answers.

"I've made out with girls, yeah," Ceci admitted at a certain point. "Who hasn't? We're in college."

Dustin stared at his girlfriend, dumbfounded.

"I have," Tina said.

"Me too," Max spoke.

Eleven's eyes gazed down to her own lap as she tried to avoid talking. For the last three years, she practically made out only with Mike (taken a few guys at random parties), so trying it out with a girl hadn't even been on her mind. When partying, she always had one goal: Mike's lips.

Eleven's phone suddenly beeped.

Sean

It ended now. Is it a good time to come over?

Eleven replied, *Sure. Please come and save me. They are playing a stupid game.*

She put her phone down and looked up. Her eyes met Mike's. He was completely ignoring his girlfriend's hand on his hair, or Dustin's loud voice next to him. He was just eyeing her with those stupid, brown eyes while he bit the corner of his bottom lip, thoughtful. He was trying to read her.

When did it become so hard for Mike to read her?

"Tina," Ceci called, ready for the next round of questions. She had a

smirk on her face, something that meant no good. Ceci was one of the kind; she was sweet, but she liked drama too.

“Yes?”

“How far have you gone with a guy?”

Tina snorted. Next to her, Mike’s eyes kept locked to Eleven’s.

“That’s a bit rude, babe,” Dustin tried to whisper in her ear, but said it too loud.

“Why?” Ceci asked confused.

“What if Mike gets offended?” Eleven said, raising her chin in a defying way, her eyes changeling Mike to keep staring at her. Or not. Honestly, she didn’t know what she wanted him to do.

“Why would I?” Mike replied. “I’ve done stuff with girls before her. She knows that.” He looked at his girlfriend. “You can answer that without offending, no worries.”

Tina rolled her eyes and sat up straight, pulling her hand from Mike’s hair.

“I know. I’ve had sex, if that’s what you wanted to know,” Tina answered Ceci. “I’ve had a couple of boyfriends before Mike.”

Ceci was pleased with the answer. So, the game kept on going. Mike’s eyes finally moved away from Eleven. She sighed, almost as if a weight had been taken off her shoulders. Yet, there was a bit of anger buzzing inside of her. She wanted him to keep looking at her. She wanted him to stare so much that Tina would notice.

Eleven closed her eyes for a second. Her thoughts were driving her crazy.

“I choose Max,” Lucas announced.

Eleven looked at her best friend, who was glaring at her boyfriend with watery eyes. She wanted to cry, but was keeping herself together.

“What?” She said in a harsh voice.

“Can I ask you a question?” Lucas replied.

“You just did.”

“Max-“ Lucas’ voice was a bit angry. Everyone in the room suddenly realized that something was going to go wrong right now.

“Ask,” Max allowed, refusing to meet his glare.

“What’s the one thing that you are most scared that people will find out about you?”

Max glanced at Lucas.

“I don’t like Game of Thrones as much as before.”

“Whaaat?” Dustin gasped, shocked.

“Bullshit,” Lucas spit out in an unforgiving tone of voice.

Max lost her shit, “YOU KNOW WHAT, LUCAS? FUCK YOU.” She stood up and, tripping over the people sitting on the floor, she made her way out of the living-room. She went into the hallway. A door slammed loudly.

No one spoke at first. Then, Lucas muttered something under his breath and went after his girlfriend.

Eleven’s eyes met Mike’s and he asked her a silent question. Was everything okay?

No, nothing was okay.

Not even us, you idiot, Eleven thought and looked away from her best friend.

“Well, that was... interesting,” Will commented, his eyes avoiding everyone else’s.

“Do you think we should check on them?” Tina asked, worried.

“Let them be,” Eleven remarked. Everyone looked at her. “They just need to talk some stuff over.”

There was a quiet agreement, eyes meeting by accident and an awkward vibe among the ones that were left in the living-room.

“Well,” Dustin coughed, “is Sean still coming or not, El?”

“Yeah, he is,” Eleven replied. “He’ll be here any time soon.”

Maybe he can cheer this up, she thought.

Her gaze turned to the hallway’s entrance. She hoped everything turned okay with Max and Lucas. She hoped Max told him the truth and that he would be supportive of her.

She couldn’t imagine being in Max’s shoes right now. What choice would she make if she suddenly found out she was pregnant? She would probably throw up, too fucking frightened of the change.

Change. It was always change.

Sean showed up a few minutes later. He looked around at the unpleasant environment in the living-room and whispered in Eleven’s ear his confusion. She discreetly explained to him that Max and Lucas had a bit of a fight, but they were working it out.

“Well, let’s watch a movie or what?” Ceci asked, trying to ease the mood.

Someone (Eleven didn’t catch who) decided to put on *Mean Girls*. They turned the volume up in case Max and Lucas raised their voices – something that had not happened yet, but you never knew with couples’ quarrels.

Sean wrapped his arm around Eleven and she took the opportunity to pull herself onto his lap, throwing her legs over the armchair’s armrest and making herself comfortable. In the corner of her eye, she saw Tina laying her head on Mike’s shoulder.

She used to be the one that put her head on his shoulder.

It was so comfortable...

Eleven looked away fast.

After God knows how long, they heard a door opening and steps echoing towards the living-room. Someone put the movie on pause.

Max and Lucas showed up, holding hands and their eyes red.

Lucas cleared his throat. "We're leaving, if that's okay."

"What about me?" Will asked in a weak tone.

Lucas looked at his friend and Max turned her head, clearing trying to keep herself from crying in front of people.

"You can crash here if you want," Mike offered. "I mean, it's Sunday tomorrow."

"And we can take you home if necessary," Dustin added.

"Okay then," Will muttered.

After Max and Lucas left, Eleven sent her friend a quick text: *hope you guys are okay*. Then, she turned back to the movie, cuddling Sean's chest.

Notes for the Chapter:

I promise things will get better in the following chapters, but the angst is necessary for a while or everything would look too rush.

Kudos & Comments are welcomed!

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello everyone!

This chapter is shorter than usual, but I hope you guys enjoy it as much as the others.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize.

October, 5th. Thursday. 13:33

They met by chance. Mike was walking in one of the coffee shops near his house, checking his watch since he had agreed to meet Tina here around one pm, when he suddenly bumped into someone. That someone was Eleven.

“El,” he said, the corner of his lips tugged in a happy smile. Because he was always so happy to see her.

Eleven stared at Mike, holding a takeaway cup of hot chocolate in one hand and her school books in the other.

“Mike,” she said more politely.

“How are you?” Mike asked, pulling back on the happy tone, as he saw she was a bit uncomfortable.

“Fine. And you?”

“Fine too.”

They stared at each other.

It hurt.

Why did it keep hurting?

Why can't I keep my fingers off you, baby?

I want you, na na

Beyoncé's voice made itself heard in their silence. And it was so fucking ironic and Eleven couldn't help but smile sadly, remembering how that *stupid* Beyoncé song was one of the *stupid* songs that Mike had put in that *stupid* mixed CD they used when they first slept together.

Everything, literally everything – even the fucking weather and she was not joking – reminded Eleven of Mike. It was a bit cold today, a bit too windy, and the first thing she thought when she had left the dorms was *Mike hates how his hair looks when it's windy. I bet he is going to wear a beanie today.*

And he was wearing a fucking dark green beanie that made his stupid face look cute.

"We need to talk," Mike acknowledged.

Eleven opened her mouth to reply when the door behind them opened and Tina came in.

"Oh. hey you two!" She greeted with her stupid, friendly smile. She approached them and leaned to kiss Mike on the lips. Eleven gazed away.

It hurt so fucking much.

"Hey. Can you grab us a table?" Mike asked nicely. "I just need a word with El."

Tina looked at the two of them, confused, and then nodded. She walked away.

"When are you free?" Mike asked.

Eleven shrugged.

"Whenever."

Mike's eyebrows went up.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Then, why are you always so busy when I text you?”

Eleven sighed.

“You want to talk now?”

Mike stopped himself from saying something too loud. He took a deep breath.

“No, I don’t,” he stated in a calm voice. “Can we please meet later?”

“Later when?”

“Tonight.”

“No.”

She would not go to his flat at night. She knew how things went; or, at least, how they used to go. If she went there after dinner, she would get too tired to go back home and, most likely they wouldn’t let her walk back to the dorms. She would stay the night. And what used to happen when she stayed the night? Yeah, something that couldn’t happen nowadays. But they had slipped once. They had made out in a stranger’s bathroom.

“El,” Mike sighed. “I-“

“Tomorrow afternoon,” Eleven suggested.

“Tomorrow afternoon?”

“Yeah. Can you?”

“Sure. Where?”

Eleven hesitated. “Here.”

Mike raised an eyebrow and then looked up, meeting probably Tina’s gaze, since he offered a small smile to something behind her

shoulder.

“Okay, tomorrow afternoon, here,” he agreed, offering an appeasing smile.

Yet, Eleven didn’t reply with any kindness. Without a word or a smile, she left, her arm accidentally bumping into his.

The walk back to her dorms was an angry one. She no longer needed the hot chocolate to keep her warm; it was like her entire body was flaming up in anger and hurt. And, in her head, playing in repeat, was that Beyoncé song and remainders of how life was at beginning of the year. In January, for instance, they spent an entire day in bed, smoking, talking, watching TV shows in Mike’s computer. In February, they spent Valentine’s Day together because everyone else was busy feeling ‘the love’ and all that crap. She and Mike had sex in his flat’s kitchen and bathroom. There were still pictures on her phone – and on his too – of that day. Shit. Didn’t Tina check her boyfriend’s phone? Eleven was everywhere on it.

Fuck, stop it.

The Beyoncé song kept on playing in her head.

But why? Why did they get here? Hadn’t she been enough? Hadn’t their agreement been good enough?

Shit, fuck, El, Mike has the right to-

Yeah, yeah. Mike had the right to fall in love and be with someone that could actually give him something stable and-

But hadn’t they been stable? Hadn’t their friendship been everything that a friendship should be and more?

Hadn’t they, in their own way, loved each other just right?

Eleven opened her dorm room’s door with so much violence that her drink almost slipped from her hand.

“Wow, Ellie,” Max said from her bed, half-laying down with her laptop and a book in front of her.

She had spent the weekend with Lucas and that had seemed to make her feel better. When Eleven finally saw her, on Monday afternoon after classes, Max seemed lighter and smiled more. She and Lucas talked, made promises to go to the doctor together and then decide what to do. Together. Always together.

“Are you okay?”

“Just great,” Eleven muttered, dropping her books on the desk she shared with Max and putting down her drink – which was cold and disgusting now – on her night table. She sat down on the bed and leaned down to take off her shoes.

Max stared at her all the time, frowning.

“Do you want to talk?”

“No.” Eleven threw her shoes to the other side of the room. “You know what? I do. Mike is an idiot. Why was I friends with him for long?”

Max sat up straight, confused, and closed her laptop’s screen in the process.

“What did he do?”

“He-“ Eleven shut herself up, biting her bottom lip. She looked away and calmed down. Suddenly, anger was gone and there was only sadness. “I bumped into him in the coffee shop and he said he wanted to have a talk with me later.”

Max’s eyebrow twitched.

“Yeah, I know,” Eleven spat out, the anger coming back for a second. “It’s stupid, but- I don’t know, Maxie. I just...” She didn’t know what to say; how to say it.

“You’re afraid of your own thoughts,” Max finished for her.

Eleven nodded.

“Yeah, that.”

She pulled her legs up and turned her body, laying down on the bed. Feeling something sharp hurting her back, she put a hand behind her and grabbed a stupid pen that she had no idea where it came from.

“Oh, I think that’s Lucas’,” Max said in an apologetic voice. “We studied here this morning.”

Eleven rolled her eyes and threw the pen at her best friend.

“Anyway, what were you saying?” Max asked, putting the pen on her night table, next to her cell phone.

Eleven sighed.

“I just- I don’t know, Maxie. I like being with Sean, I really, really do, but... I just miss being with Mike like we used to be before- before everything changed.” Eleven laid down on her side, hands under her head. “I know Mike has the right to be with whoever he wants and I’m with whom I –“ She hesitated –“want to be. I just... I don’t know...”

Max pressed her lips together, eyebrows furrowed, before she jumped off the bed and walked up to Eleven’s side of the room.

“Can I ask you something?”

Eleven nodded.

“How was it like?” Max asked, sitting on the edge of the bed. Eleven frowned, confused, but kept on listening. “I’ve known you guys for two years, but I never got to ask you how it was like... to be with him. I mean, sex. Why did you guys do it for so long? Was it that good?”

Eleven stared at Max, a bit surprised that her friend finally asked her about it. When they first became close friends and Eleven confessed to her that she and Mike had a friends-with-benefits kind of relationship going on, Max’s answer had been ‘Nice idea’ and had done the same with Dustin. But she never once asked about why they started doing, why they kept doing it... How it felt to be with each other for so long.

So, how did it feel?, Eleven asked herself. To be with Mike. To kiss him, to have his hands all over her, to hear his groans and whispers in her ear... How did it feel to know she had, for a long time, been the only one to know what triggered him? What made him moan, what made him want to kiss her, what made him want to say, ‘fuck it’ to all his responsibilities and stay in bed with her.

Why did they do it for so long?

Finally, Eleven answered, “Do you know how you suddenly find out this movie, or TV show or book, and you get addicted to it? Like, you are reading it and already dreading that it’s going to be over, or you’re so excited with a movie that you want to re-watch it the next day? Or when you’re patiently waiting for the next season of that TV show you love the most, but you want it so badly that you go back to re-watch the previous seasons, and yet you’re satisfied, but you’re not?”

“I think you’re high,” Max replied, her lips turned in a small smile. “But yeah, I know.”

“That’s what sex felt like with Mike,” Eleven answered.

That was how it felt to be with Mike.

As soon as that sudden realization gained its shape and deepness inside Eleven’s mind, her heart beat faster and her breathing shook. Max grabbed her hand and looked at her, worried.

Eleven closed her eyes, feeling tears in them.

She would never feel with Sean what she felt with Mike. And she was going to hurt Sean so bad. She would never be enough for him, no matter how much she tried.

“Are you okay, Ellie?”

“No,” Eleven muttered, her eyes closed. “I’m in love with Mike.”

October, 6th. Friday. 16:05

Mike felt utter and complete relief when he walked in the coffee shop, already running late, and saw Eleven sitting on a roundish table, alone, her purse and a cup of hot chocolate in front of her. Her head was tilted as she gazed at the small TV above the counter, where you could see Vh1 channel on. There was a soft song playing from hidden speakers, matching the music video happening on the TV. The singer's voice was full of emotion and pain.

Mike approached the table and smiled softly at Eleven, happy that she was actually there.

Eleven looked back at him for a second and then her eyes flicked down to her cup of hot chocolate.

"I'm sorry, I'm late."

"It's okay. I was enjoying the music," Eleven admitted.

Mike turned his head to the TV and paid attention to the song playing.

And I told you when you left me

There's nothing to forgive

But I always thought you'd come back, tell me all you found was

Heartbreak and misery

"Whose song is it?"

"Labrinth. It's called Jealous."

Mike realized he probably had heard it before. Or, at least, he thought he did because Eleven was mouthing the lyrics while playing with the rim of her paper cup and he was sure he knew all songs she liked.

"I'm glad you are here," Mike announced.

And, fuck, when did they get to this point? Where Mike had to tell Eleven he was happy – and relieved – that he was able to see her, his best friend?

“You wanted to talk,” Eleven said, avoiding his gaze. “And we made plans. So yeah, I’m here.”

And what, she wasn’t glad to see him there too?

Mike was about to open his mouth and start rambling about how everything was wrong and she had just hurt him when one of the waiters came to take his order. He asked for a coffee and waited until they were alone again to speak.

“I think we’re.... falling apart, El,” he chose his words carefully, waiting for her reaction. Waiting for her to say, *no, that’s stupid, Michael*.

“You’re right,” Eleven agreed.

Mike froze, shocked. No, El, you weren’t supposed to agree. You were supposed to appease his mind and stupid thoughts. You were supposed to call him stupid, or idiot. Make everything okay again.

“What else?” Eleven asked.

“I-“

The waiter came back to bring Mike his coffee.

“Thanks,” Mike muttered. The waiter left. He looked at Eleven. “What happened?”

Eleven shrugged and grabbed her hot chocolate, taking it to her lips. After she put the drink down, she cleaned her mouth with the back of her thumb and said, “I don’t know, Mike. Life happened, I suppose. You’re busy with classes and Tina, and I’m busy with classes, Max, Sean and whatever happens meanwhile.”

Mike stared at her. It was like he was breaking from inside out. Eleven’s argument was complete bullshit. They were never too busy for each other. At least, not to the point they fall apart.

“El, come on,” Mike begged.

“You should drink your coffee, Mike,” Eleven motioned to the cup of still warm coffee in front of him. “Or it becomes a waste of money.”

Mike sat up straight against the back of the chair. He grabbed the two sugar packs that came with the coffee and poured them in the drink. He stirred it for a while, watching Eleven drink her hot chocolate as she paid attention to the new video clip on the TV.

“What’s happened?” Mike asked again. “And, this time, be honest.”

Eleven refused to meet his eyes. She lowered down her head, playing with the rim of the paper cup again.

“We never had a serious talk about it, but, Michael, we were sleeping with each other.” Eleven finally met his gaze. “We were friends who fucked each other. And now we each have someone in our lives that apparently mean more to us than we do to each other. That’s what happened, Mike.”

“But-“

“But what, Mike? Are you honestly telling me that we can just be friends?” Eleven demanded to know. “That what happened that one drunk time in that bathroom isn’t going to happen again when we are drunk or high? Can you tell me that it won’t happen?”

“If we try enough-“

Eleven shook her head.

“We can’t just be friends, Mike,” she stated.

“Yes, we can. El,” Mike leaned forward, almost tipping his cup of coffee. “El, above all, we are friends and we-“

“I can’t just be friends with you, Mike!” Eleven interrupted, her voice a bit too loud. Some people around them even turned their heads to ogle at them.

Mike went quiet.

“Okay?” Eleven said more quietly. “I can’t. I won’t. I’m with Sean. You’re with Tina. You have Dustin, I have Max. You have your Creative Writing, I have Speech Therapy.”

“But, El...”

“But what? This is it, Mike.”

Please, just please, read between the lines. Understand what I am saying, a small voice asked inside Eleven’s head.

But Mike didn’t get it. He just stared at her, hurt that his best friend was breaking up with him, was ruining their friendship without a valid reason. He didn’t see it past her words.

“I thought-“ Mike licked his lips, buying himself some time. “I thought we were going to be friends forever, El.”

Eleven gulped, tears burning her eyes, her teeth hurting her bottom lip. He didn’t get it. He would never get it.

Out of blue, Eleven grabbed her purse and her half-drunk hot chocolate.

“I guess life has change.” She stood up. “Don’t worry, I’ve already paid my drink.” And, with that, she left.

Mike didn’t go after her, too shocked, too... messed up to process what had just happened. So, he sat on that roundish table for so long he forgot the time. His coffee, which he never got to finish, turned cold and a waiter came by to ask him if he wanted something else. Mike managed to ask for a cupcake. A chocolate one.

Eleven liked chocolate ones the most.

When was the last time he saw her eat a cupcake?

When was the last time he heard her laugh?

I’d be less angry if it was my decision

And the money was just rolling in

Mike's eyes turned to the small TV above the counter. A black and white music clip was rolling. The singer had short, blonde hair. Or, at least, it seemed she did. Mike stared at her.

His phone rang a couple of times. He didn't pick it up.

He kept on watching the music videos that popped up on the TV. Sam Smith, turns out, had a new song. Kesha was back. Rihanna's Love On The Brain was still a success.

Eleven left.

Eleven broke up with him.

The reasons she gave him, they made sense, yes, but they weren't enough to leave him there, complete broken, with no rational thought on his head.

Why did it have to change?

Hadn't their deal – their unspoken arrangement of three years – been something they had got so they wouldn't suffer?

"I'm just tired," Eleven had once confessed to him, her eyes drunk blurred and her hands playing with Mike's half-opened shirt. They were in someone's bedroom, at a random party. Seventeen and young. "When you start liking someone, it's a change, you know? I don't like changes and I'm tired of them."

Mike had nodded, understanding. He had raised his hand and touched her soft cheekbone.

"Well, at least, with me, you don't need to feel scared or tired, El. I promise," he had said.

What an asshole of a promise that was now.

The cupcake was half-eaten when someone stopped in front of Mike's table. He saw the shadow covering him and looked up.

“Hey man,” Dustin greeted. He motioned to the vacant seat on the other side of the table. The seat Eleven had left empty. “Do you mind?”

Mike shook his head. Dustin sat down.

“What’s up? You’ve been in here for hours, man. I’ve tried to call you. Tina has.... I had to call El to know where you guys had met.”

Mike blinked.

“Is she worried?”

Dustin frowned and shook his head.

“I didn’t say anything to make her worry. I just asked her where you guys met. Pretended I had gone the wrong place to meet you.” Dustin looked around before adding, “Are you still here because of her?”

Mike shrugged.

“I’ll take that as a yes. You guys cool?”

Mike shook his head.

“What happened?”

“We can’t be friends.”

“Why?”

“We had sex too many times,” Mike answered.

Dustin pressed his lips together and nodded, understanding.

“I guess that makes sense.”

Mike looked up. Dustin saw anger in the brown iris of his best friend’s eyes.

“No, it doesn’t. Above all, we are friends. We have always been friends. We-“

“Sometimes, Mike,” Dustin interrupted him –“, I think you need to suffer a bit to understand the reality of what’s around you.”

Mike wrinkled his eyebrow, baffled. Dustin shook his head and stood up.

“Come on, man. I’ll pay for your cupcake,” he offered.

“And coffee,” Mike added. “I ordered a cup of coffee too.”

Dustin chuckled and patted Mike’s shoulder.

“I’ll pay for that too. Come on. Let’s go home. Maybe watch some old episodes of Bob’s Burgers?”

Eleven liked Bob’s Burgers.

Mike closed his eyes.

Well, fuck.

October, 16th. Monday. 20:33

“Yeah, I’m eating healthy, Mama... No, I’m not only eating fast food. Who do you take me for?” Eleven asked her mother, offended.

Terry Ives chuckled softly.

“I’m sorry, sweetie,” she said on the other side of the line. “I worry.”

“I know, Mama. But I’ve been in college for two years now. Almost three. I don’t think you need to worry, okay? I know I need to eat properly or I’ll lose focus and weight and all that bad things you like to list for me.”

Her mother let out a sighed smile.

“I’m that annoying, eh?”

“No, Mama.” Eleven smiled, rolling the wheeled chair closer to the desk. “You’re just too worried. But I’m all good.”

“Okay, okay. How’s Mike? Eating healthy too?”

Eleven felt a gulp in her throat.

“Yeah, Mama. You know I make him eat good,” she answered. It had been true. Eleven used to go to the boys’ flat and cook with one of them. They were usually too lazy to cook, but when she was there, they tried their best. Yet, now, she didn’t know what kind of food Mike was eating. If he cooked for him and Tina, if he ordered take-out almost every night...

They weren’t friends anymore. Eleven had made that clear the last time she was with him. Her mother couldn’t know, though. Not yet.

Their lives had been too entangled to simply break it all off and not have consequences.

The dorm room’s door opened and Max walked in, her face paler than usual and her red hair tied up in a ponytail. She had had the doctor appointment that afternoon.

“Mama, Max just got back from her classes. Can we talk tomorrow?”

“Of course, sweetie. Have a good night,” Terry replied.

“Night, Mama.” Eleven hung up, put her phone down and spun around, leaving behind the tuna salad she had been eating, so she could face Max. “How was it?”

Max hung her purse on the wardrobe’s knob and took off her shoes. She sighed and said, “Fine. I’m pregnant. Almost six weeks. The baby is healthy. Lucas will do whatever I want.” She sat down on her bed and dropped her head on her hands. “I don’t know what I want, Ellie.”

Eleven bit her bottom lip, concerned. She looked over at her food and phone before standing up and moving to sit next to her friend. She wrapped an arm around Max’s shoulders.

“What’s in your head?”

Max raised her head, her hands falling to her lap, and sighed.

"I mean, ... I have goals, you know? I want to finish my studies, I want a job, ... I want to focus on my career," Max listed, playing with her fingers nervously. "But... I heard his, or her, heartbeat, Ellie. I saw Lucas' amazed face and... I felt... happy. Should I feel this way if I really didn't want anything to do with this?" And she touched her belly.

"I... don't know what to tell you, Maxie," Eleven said with honesty. "I wouldn't know what to do if I were you."

Max put her hands down and sighed.

"Lucas doesn't help. He thinks he does, but he doesn't... I can't make this decision on my own, you know?"

"So, tell him that. Tell him it's not only up to you."

Max licked her lips and glanced over at Eleven.

"I think he's afraid that... he'll tell me he wants to keep the baby and I won't want that. Or, you know, he tells me he doesn't want to and I want to. What do we do then?" Max hid her face behind her hands again. Eleven stroked her back, trying to give her some support.

But she, honestly, had no words to her best friend's conscious.

How do you advise someone on a situation you've never been in, nor could imagine yourself being? Eleven had never thought about this case scenario. Getting pregnant before time, before she was ready... Would she opt to go ahead with the pregnancy, or quit it? It didn't matter if she had an answer for it now, for the hypothetical situation, when her mind could go a different way if it actually happened.

"Hell, I can't even buy alcohol in a bar, but I'm carrying a baby," Max suddenly blurted, raising her head. She was keeping her tears hidden. "I... I... I don't know what to do."

Eleven's hand stopped moving and she tried to offer Max a reassuring smile.

"It's okay. I think... what you need now is to clear your head and –" Eleven's phone suddenly buzzed, interrupting her speech. She

glanced at it before giving Max all the attention. “And watch a movie, read something, eat, ... *sleep*. Tomorrow is a new day. You can talk to Lucas then, you can make up your mind then. Okay, Maxie?”

It took her a few seconds, but, finally, Max nodded, agreeing. She rubbed her eyes with the palms of her hands and took two deep breaths.

“I’m going to the bathroom. Take a shower.”

“That’s a nice idea,” Eleven remarked with a small smile.

Max grabbed all her stuff and walked out of the room, holding in her arms a towel, underwear and her favourite red pyjamas.

Eleven picked up her cell phone. There was a message on Messenger from Mike. She frowned, confused, and opened it.

It was a meme. A stupid meme about Game of Thrones and the character of Cersei Lannister.

Eleven stared at it until laughter burst out of her throat and she had to close her eyes and shook her head, thinking *this boy is unbelievable*.

A new message from Mike came in. This time it was a link to a YouTube video. She opened it and one of the songs from Rick and Morty started playing. *Moonmen*. She and Mike knew that song by heart. They spent afternoons annoying Dustin with it. They spent study hours singing it to each other. Sometimes, they would be making out and one of them would hummed the song, persuading the other to start singing it. They would laugh at how stupid they both were and kept on kissing each other.

Eleven put down the phone, the song running, and grabbed her unfinished salad. She didn’t feel hungry anymore.

She didn’t know what to feel anymore.

Notes for the Chapter:

I promise angst will be over soon... Kind of.

Tell me what you think.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, everyone!

Yees, I'm back with a new chapter. I have had ZERO TIME to work on this... College has started and it's my last year, so it's all a mess... I just feel like running away.

Anyway, here's chapter ten. I hope you guys enjoy it. I tried to proof-read it, but I'm always out of time.

October, 31st. Tuesday. 16:31

"You want to know what I found out?" Dustin asked Mike during dinner. They were in their kitchen, sitting face to face while enjoying takeaway Chinese food. They had come home too exhausted to coke, after having spent the day in classes, delivering and presenting projects.

The last month had been completely bananas; they barely had time for sleep, let alone enjoy a party or go for a walk outside. All essays piled up, all to be delivered around the same time (why do teachers think that two-days-apart deadlines are okay?). It was insane, but they were used to it. It was like this every year: at some point in the semester, they would have some crazy, super busy weeks that would drive them insane, but, in the end, everything would turn out okay.

Mike, who had barely got himself a few hours of rest this last week, since he had had this huge presentation to prepare and could barely sleep by thinking of it too much, nodded in response to his friend's question.

"Max's pregnant."

Mike raised his eyes from the food to look at Dustin, doubtful. Max, pregnant?

"I'm serious."

“How did you find that out?” Mike asked.

Dustin took a sip of his water before saying, “I- I was with El and Max yesterday.”

Mike looked down again. He didn’t even remember the last time he had properly talked to Eleven. All they did nowadays was send each other’s songs and memes. Mike was too afraid to start small conversation with her through Messenger, fearing she would just ignore it. At least, with songs and memes, he knew that, sooner or later, she would send something back.

“And is Max okay?” Mike asked.

“Yeah. She... She wants the baby. And Lucas too. So yeah.”

Mike nodded, biting his bottom lip. Max, Eleven’s best friend, slash roommate, slash light of her life (they were so funnily ridiculous sometimes) was pregnant. That was a sentence Mike never thought he would ever hear out loud.

And Lucas? Well, he had barely hung out with Max’s boyfriend since the two had started dating, but he seemed like a cool guy. A reasonable one, that was for sure.

“As long as they are happy,” Mike commented at last.

Dustin agreed, chewing on a piece of pork meat.

They were quiet for a while, going back to eating without any chit chat to fill in the silence. Dustin and Mike had known each other for so long that they weren’t scare of awkward quietness between the two. Years and years of friendship and living together eventually led to some quiet moments between them. There wasn’t much they could say after telling everything, right?

“How’s sex with Tina like?”

Mike almost choked on a piece of chicken. He had to drink a gulp of water before looking at Dustin with a baffled expression.

“What?” Dustin asked innocently.

“Why are you asking me that?”

“Well,” Dustin took a fork full of rice to his mouth, “because I can finally ask you –“he chewed the rice a bit –“ about it. Before I couldn’t do it.”

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“Why couldn’t you do it before?”

“Because I knew El?” Dustin answered in a interrogated tone. Mike blinked. “Because, for the first time in your life, you are in a relationship with someone I don’t know that well?”

When all he got from Mike was a confusing expression, Dustin dropped his fork and leaned back on his chair. “Listen, man, Tina sounds great and all, but I don’t see her as my friend; I see her as your girlfriend, okay? El was and still is my friend. I couldn’t possible ask you how she was in bed. I didn’t want to know!” Then, out of blue, he chuckled and leaned forwards, grabbing his fork again. “Well, I knew a bit too much. Unfortunately, the walls in this place are thin...”

Dustin ate another piece of sour pork, chewed it slowly and refilled his glass of water, before Mike finally opened his mouth and spoke.

“I wasn’t in a relationship with El.”

Dustin snorted and glanced at his best friend. “Really? That’s the only counter-argument that you have for me?”

Mike licked his lips nervously and avoided Dustin’s eyes.

“Yeah, I mean... But you could have asked, you know?”

Dustin made a face.

“Dude, I didn’t want to, okay?”

“But now you do?”

“Yeah, now I’m interested,” Dustin replied with a simple shrug.

Mike sighed.

He played around with his food for a bit, removing small pieces of green pepper from between the pasta and the chicken. He hated green pepper, but always forgot to ask to take it off his order.

“I haven’t had sex with Tina,” Mike said.

Dustin looked surprised.

“I mean, ... we have done stuff,” Mike confessed. His friend smirked. He rolled his eyes. “But I- Well, we haven’t wanted to... move forwards?”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

It scared him, really. If Mike were to be completely honest, he would say he was shit-scared. Because Tina would be the first girl he ever slept with after Eleven. And, for some reason, he didn’t want that in his life. He didn’t want to have someone after Eleven.

Ever since he was seventeen, he associated sex with Eleven. She was the only one he had ever wanted to do it with. And now? Now he was dating Tina and yeah, they got along and sometimes their make-out sessions went a bit further and sometimes, yeah, they would lose their clothes, but sex? Sex – and he knew it sounded crazy - was never on his mind.

It felt like cheating.

Mike suddenly laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Dustin asked.

He shook his head.

“Nothing.”

His phone’s screen went bright as a Messenger message came in. Mike grabbed it immediately and saw that Eleven had sent him a

YouTube video. He bit his own smile, keeping himself together, since he knew Dustin was looking at him with curiosity in his eyes.

“Who is it?”

“Tina,” Mike lied.

Why did he lie?

“Well, El,” he confessed.

Dustin opened his mouth in amazement. A smile curled up in his lips.

“Are you guys-“

“No,” Mike shook his head. “Nope. We... Well, I don’t want to lose her, right?” Dustin nodded, like what he had just said was obvious. “But I knew she... would refuse to talk to me, or text me... So, after that day on the coffee shop, I started sending her videos and memes.” Dustin snorted. Mike sighed. “I know I’m an idiot, but it’s working. She sends me stuff sometimes. We never talk, though.”

Dustin frowned at first, finding the all situation strange. But then, he shrugged and said, “You guys are weird.”

“Thanks,” Mike muttered.

After dinner, he went to his bedroom, closed the door and laid on the bed. He went back to the Messenger conversation with Eleven and opened the link she had sent him.

It was video of a comedian called Iliza who went on James Corden’s show last year. Mike grabbed his ear-phones from his night table’s first drawer and put them on. He spent the next six minutes hearing a blonde woman talking about how women got ready for dates. He laughed sometimes, finding it ridiculous, yet with some good points, knowing very well this was the exactly kind of stuff Eleven found amusing.

When the video ended, he opened Eleven’s chat. He really thought about replying something with words. He even typed down an answer: *Cool Video. Totally your thing.* But then he erased it, went

searching for a funny meme and sent it back.

Eleven saw it a few minutes later, but didn't reply. Maybe tomorrow there would be a meme or a new YouTube link waiting for him. But, for now, this was all he was getting from her.

This was their friendship now. He had to accept it.

November, 2nd. Thursday. 17:17

"Sam."

Eleven looked up from her laptop's screen, where she had open one of her still in progress essays, and frowned, confused at Max's suddenly burst.

"Sam?"

Her redhaired friend nodded, biting the corner of her mouth.

"Is it a good name?"

Eleven blinked.

Max sat up straight on her bed, moving her laptop to her lap. The sound of her writing on the keyboard echoed in the room before she looked up, a question in her eyes.

"For a baby?" Eleven asked.

Max nodded.

"But do you know if it's a boy or a girl?" Eleven wondered.

"No. We want it to be a surprise," Max explained. "Haven't I told you that?"

Eleven shook her head.

"Oh, sorry." Max smiled kindly. "But yeah, Lucas and I have agreed not to know the sex of the baby until he or she was born. So, we have

to pick a neutral name. Like Sam.”

“Or Max.”

Max’s smile widened, mischief in her eyes. But then she shook her head and joked, “Lucas might love me, but not that much.”

Eleven rolled her eyes, her lips stretching in a relaxed smile. She laid down, resting her head on her arm and scrolled down her essay for a bit, trying to find any grammar mistakes.

Max and Lucas had decided to keep the baby. It had been a mutual decision; one that was made after hours and hours of talking to each other, alone, in his flat. They really felt they were doing the right thing. Eleven had asked her friend if she was sure she wasn’t going to regret it and Max had replied, *El, you know me. You know I wouldn’t go ahead with any kind of decision if I wasn’t, at least, 100% sure.*

“When are you telling your parents?” Eleven suddenly asked.

“Next week,” Max answered, her teeth now playing with the thin skin of her bottom lip.

One of the reasons that certainly led to Max’s final decision of keeping the baby was her foster parents. She knew they would have her back, no matter what, and would accept Lucas into the family without thinking twice, unlike anyone that was indeed blood-related to her.

When it came to Lucas’ family, well, he was already making sure everyone was going to accept Max and their future baby. His parents were the least of his problems as they had had him when they were very young too and, back then, both families had first rejected the idea of them having Lucas, so, now, they were both very supportive of his son.

“Do you think I can convince Lucas that Mandy is a boy’s name too?”

Eleven snorted. “I don’t think so, Maxie.”

When all things considered, both Lucas and Max knew they were young, way too young to have a kid, and still had a lifetime of

decisions, mistakes and possibilities bound to happen (you could never know what tomorrow could bring), but this choice... this one had been a decision well-thought, even though the entire situation had caught them by surprise.

Eleven's phone made a ping-sound. Knowing it was the Messenger app, she grabbed it discreetly and, glancing quickly in Max's direction, opened Mike's chat. He had sent her a video and, thankfully, she could see the title without having to open it: *Look at my Horse, my Horse is Amazing*.

Eleven snorted too loud, recognizing the video he had sent her. Even worse, she knew without a doubt that he had sent her the ten-hour version.

One night, a long time ago, Mike and Eleven got high and put on that same video with the challenge of trying and listening to all of it. They managed to hear it for one hour and three minutes.

As feedback, Eleven went on her computer, copied the link she had in that moment on YouTube and sent it to Mike. It was forty-two minutes of Disney classics on piano. She felt tempted to write something below it, but stopped herself last minute. That wasn't their friendship anymore; no words were meant to be exchanged between the two of them; only videos and memes.

"Hey, do you want to go out for dinner tonight? Lucas and Will found this great Chinese place near their flat," Max spoke.

"Hum, sure."

"You can invite Sean too, Lucas said," Max added.

Eleven tilted her head down, almost like she was hiding herself. "Nah, I think he's busy."

"Oh, okay."

Lucas and Will came to pick them up around eight pm. Will was driving and Eleven had to take the front seat next to him since Lucas and Max wanted to spend the ride holding hands and discussing baby names.

“This is all they do now,” Will complained, even though there was a kind smile curled up on his lips. He was happy for them. Or, at least, he was being supportive.

“It could be worse,” Eleven replied. “They could be discussing politics.”

“Ugh, gross.”

Will and Eleven shared a snorted laugh.

“Oh no, Lucas! We’re not going to name our kid Jaime! It’s awful!” Max complained.

“What? It’s a perfectly good name, Maxie!” Lucas replied.

There was a quiet moment.

“Fine. I had a crush on a guy called Jaime once and it didn’t end up well.”

“Okay, that’s a valid reason and I respect it. No Jaime.”

Will and Eleven shared a look and chuckled together.

“So,” Will began after a while, “how’s Sean?”

Eleven gulped and nodded before saying, “Fine, he’s fine. And... Well, that’s it? What about you? Do you have anyone in your life right now?”

Will blushed a bit, using the car indicators to turn right at the end of the road.

“Yee-ah.” He cleared his throat. “A guy named Charlie. He’s in Lucas’ classes.”

“Awn, that’s cool, Will,” Eleven offered a kind smile.

Will pressed his lips together, his tongue sticking out of his mouth quickly.

“Yeah, but...it’s nothing serious. I mean, he –” Will cleared his throat

again –“he isn’t out, so...”

“Oh. I get it.”

“Yeah.”

Things went quiet after that.

The Chinese place was a really nice restaurant with funny pictures all over the walls. They sat by a squarish picture of a pig dancing ballet and a waitress immediately came by to offer them some menus.

“Dude, I don’t even know what to pick,” Lucas sighed after checking the possibilities twice. He looked at his girlfriend. “What are you having?”

“Hum, maybe the... the chicken dish? I don’t even know how to say those words,” Max made a face, widening her eyes as if she were scared.

“I want dumplings,” Eleven announced.

“Only dumplings?” Will asked.

“Maybe one of the pasta dishes.”

They ordered after a while, Lucas and Will asking for beer while the girls picked water.

“Who comes to a restaurant and orders water?” Lucas teased, dropping an arm around his girlfriend.

“Someone who isn’t in the mood to put up with your cheeky remarks,” Max replied, leaning her head against Lucas’ shoulder and looking up at him with adoration.

Eleven and Will glanced at each other and pressed their lips in a sympathetic smile. How fun it was to be the third wheel in a couple’s night out.

“You guys are going to become more and more disgusting with time, aren’t you?” Eleven joked.

“No,” Max answered seriously.

“Yup,” Lucas disagreed. “Or, at least, I am.”

Max rolled her eyes.

“I can’t believe you’re still in my life,” she tried to say in a very serious tone of voice, but her smile was selling her out.

“You’re the one that gave him reasons to stick around,” Eleven threw.

Lucas laughed as Max faked shock and betrayed.

“My own best friend!”

Dinner was delicious. But halfway through it Max felt sick and had to go throw up. Lucas had to explain to the waitress that she was pregnant and it was nothing against the food while Eleven was in the bathroom with her friend, holding her hair up. But that wasn’t something new to her.

“I missed holding your hair as you throw up,” she joked and leaned against the bathroom’s wall.

Max stopped washing her face to glare at her best friend through the mirror.

Eleven giggled.

“God, I can’t believe you just giggled,” Max remarked as she moved to grab a few tissue papers and clean her face.

“What’s wrong with me giggling?” Eleven asked.

“You used to do it a lot when you talked to Mike on the phone.”

Max stared at her, wiggling her eyebrows in a defying, solemn way. She knew she was testing Eleven by reminding her of the good, old days.

Yeah, Max liked Sean. She saw him as a great guy. But since Eleven confessed to be in love with Mike, Max, at random opportunities,

liked to tease her. Not to make her angry or sad, no, but to remind her *of the lie she was living* and how easy it would be to turn things around. All Eleven had to do was talk to Mike. Max was so sure everything would work out if she just talked to him.

Yet, there was pride. Eleven's inner pride didn't allow her to go out there once again, look Mike in the eyes, and try to confess something.

It was his turn.

So, Eleven shook her head, smiled at Max and replied, "Sometimes, Maxie, I think I hate you."

November, 4th. Saturday. 22:44

Sean had been the one to convince her to come to the party. He had told her she needed some time off from studying and writing essays. He was right. Eleven just wasn't in the mood for partying.

Or, at least, she wasn't until someone offered her a cup of vodka with lemon juice and she started drinking it way too quickly.

Next thing she knew, Eleven was on her third cup and had already taken two shots. She was dancing in the middle of someone's hall, her body moving to the beat of Sorry by Justin Bieber, next to Ceci and Dustin. Max had stayed home, no longer an animal party, but rather a very concerned person about her drinking and eating habits since she was carrying a life inside her. Lucas was keeping her company for the night as Eleven made plans to go home with Sean.

Well, she didn't make plans with Sean, if she were honest. When he came to pick her up, he basically told Max not to worry about her since Eleven would spend the night with him, therefore she would 100% certain be safe. Max and she assumed she would be spending the post-party hours in his house, sleeping off the alcohol from her veins. Nothing more. Because she wasn't ready for more.

"I'll take every single piece of the blame if you want me to," Eleven sung dramatically to Ceci.

"But you know that there is no innocent one in this game for twooo," Ceci sung back and spun around on the tip of her toes.

The girls laughed together and Dustin rolled his eyes. He moved to whisper something in his girlfriend's ear and then walked in the bathroom's direction at the end of the hallway.

"You guys are totally okay?" Eleven half-screamed at Ceci.

Grinning like crazy, Ceci gave her a thumbs-up before saying, "He gets it now. I get it now. It's all goooooood!"

Eleven was about to open her mouth and reply when her eyes caught something behind Ceci. Tina and Mike were walking in the party, holding hands and sharing a bottle of wine.

That used to be their thing, sharing drinks before parties and getting there together.

Before any of them could see her, Eleven switched places with Ceci and kept on dancing. Ceci didn't catch on what had just happened.

Destiny's Child's *Say My Name* started playing and both girls lost their minds. When Dustin found them, they were dancing against each other, singing the lyrics at top of their lungs. He threw his hands in the air, frustrated, and left them be, going to the kitchen to grab another beer to drink.

"Mike!" He called once he saw his best friend cuddling with his girlfriend next to the fridge.

Mike smiled at Dustin cheekily.

"Dustin, dude, what's up? Where's Ceci?"

"Dancing with-" Dustin hesitated. Should he say it? Oh, well. Fuck it. "-El."

Mike blinked, his foggy eyes widening. Tina was nursing the last drops of the bottle of wine and did not notice her boyfriend's reaction. She moved to find a trash bin.

El was here. El was nearby. His breaths got caught up in his throat and Mike forced himself to swallow saliva, his Adam's apple shaking.

Go talk to her, a voice demanded.

No, don't, the same voice said.

Mike, it's El. Your El. She's here.

But she's with Ceci.

And? Don't you want to be with her too? Talk to her after all this time?

But... Sean. And Tina. Fuck, Tina's here.

Fuck, Mike.

Mike.

"Mike?" Dustin called. "Are you cool, man?"

Mike blinked, disoriented. When he came to his full senses, he nodded a few times, reassuring Dustin that he was cool.

He had to keep it together. He was drunk, but not drunk enough to ruin everything. Tina was standing right next to him.

Wait, where was Tina?

"Where's Tina?"

Dustin looked around, suddenly realizing the girl had left as well.

"No idea. Maybe making friends somewhere?"

Mike opened his mouth like he was going to talk, but remained quiet, letting himself fall against the fridge's door. He eyed the kitchen carefully, looking at every stranger's face and slowly coming to realize there was no familiar face, except Dustin's, in that division.

That was, until he saw Sean.

Sean. Eleven's boyfriend.

Eleven's stupid, fucking perfect boyfriend who she had met at a party and had made out with. That was how they met. And it had all been Mike's fault. He had been the one that had arrived late at the party, having had some stupid essay to deliver until midnight. If he had gone earlier, if he hadn't procrastinated that fucking essay until the last minute, Eleven would have never met Sean because she would have been with Mike all night.

She was mine, even though she wasn't. She came to me after being with him. He was supposed to be a 'nothing' in her memory. And you screwed it up, Mike. You kept on going and screwing it even harder, Mike criticized himself.

Let's be honest here: if Eleven hadn't met Sean and gone on a date with him, Mike would never have got the guts to ask Tina out... Because that was why he did it, right? When he met Tina that day in the coffee shop and asked her out, he had thought, *well, if El's finding someone, I better find someone too*. He had been so freaking scared of being left alone while Eleven moved on.

And now here they were...

Mike left Dustin talking midway through a sentence – something about how he found parties dull - and approached Sean.

"Hey," he greeted.

Sean smiled brightly.

"Hey, Mike. Long time no see."

"Yeah," Mike agreed. He blinked a few times, his vision going a bit too dizzy, and then tried to smile. "How's El?"

"She's fine. Drunk right now. Somewhere in there," he pointed in the hall's direction. "I think she was with Dustin's girlfriend... Ceci?"

"Ceci, yeah," Mike answered.

Out of blue, he felt pissed. His entire body shook inside with anger. And why was it happening? Sean was being nothing but polite, making small chat like two acquaintances who did nothing wrong to

each other. Yet, Mike felt like Sean was an enemy.

“How’s your girlfriend?” Sean asked.

Mike blinked, his brain not processing the question for a second.

My girlfriend? What girlfriend?

“Tina’s great,” he finally answered.

“She’s here?”

“Yeah, somewhere. I lost her a while ago.”

Sean chuckled, giving Mike a sympathetic look like he related to him.

But he couldn’t relate to him. How dare him?

“You and El are cool, right?” Mike questioned.

Sean hesitated, giving Mike a confused look. You could see how suddenly Sean was doubting his relationship with Eleven. And why wouldn’t he? The person who was known as her ultimate best friend was asking him if everything was okay with the couple. It had to mean something, right?

“Well, yeah... I think so. We had lunch almost every day this week...”

They had lunch. Together. Almost every day of that week.

Fuck. That had been Mike’s life. Meeting up for lunch, making dinner together, grabbing dessert even though they shouldn’t, studying together, texting, telling each other everything... That had been Mike and Eleven’s life.

Leaving Sean hanging, Mike turned around and took a few steps away, ready to bolt from there. Yet, something stopped him. In the hall, he saw Eleven talking excitedly with Dustin and Ceci.

When was the last time he stood close to her? Talked to her? Hugged her?

Kissed her?

“Do you think,... do you think that there is a parallel universe in which we are, you know, together?” He had been so nervous when he asked her that question. He had feared it something that shouldn't be asked; that would make them cross a line that, perhaps, Eleven hadn't wanted.

“Together-together?” She had confirmed. And then, she had said ‘yes’. Yes to the together-together.

Eleven laughed at something that Dustin said to her, throwing her head back and hitting the wall next to her. whatever he had said it had been super amusing to drunk Eleven's ears.

Mike got angry. He turned back and walked up to Sean.

“Have you slept with her?” Mike asked the guy.

Sean stared at him, frowning.

“I don't think it's any of your bus-“

“You haven't,” Mike assumed.

Sean's frown deepened, the boy feeling uncomfortable with Mike's words. He had nothing to do with whatever he and Eleven did in their relationship; he had not right to speculate.

“You know what, Mike? You-“

Mike poked Sean's black shirt, interrupting the boy.

“I want you to know – “Mike started, stepping closer –“that I was there first.”

Sean blinked two times in a row, feeling confused. What did he mean he was there first? Like he was her friend before she was his girlfriend?

“When you sleep with her, Sean, -“Mike smirked at Sean's widened eyes -“ when you fucking think ‘shit, this feels so freaking good, she's

so freaking good', I want you to know... I was there first. For three fucking years, *Sean*. I was there. I was with her."

The sudden understanding of Mike's words crumbled Sean like a wall of bricks falling over him. The boy watched as Mike smirked and walked away, making his way out of the kitchen and going into the hall.

Sean felt like he was watching his entire life far away from his body.

What had just happened?

Mike left the place without saying a word to anyone, completely forgetting Tina. He walked all the way out of the house's property and then stopped by a street's lamp post. He looked around for a while – everything was so quiet - and then back at the house before sitting down on the cold and dirty pavement. Shoving his hand in his jacket's pocket, he took out a joint he had rolled up back at his flat. He was supposed to share it with Dustin, but who gave a shit? Dustin was somewhere inside, kissing his girlfriend, enjoying life, and Mike was all by himself, in the middle of a dark and empty street. The only company he had was the background-sound from the party and it was annoying him.

Actually, he was annoying himself.

Maybe he had fucked it all by saying those things to Sean, but, right now, he couldn't bring himself to care about it. Or about anything at all.

Mike lit the joint up, the small orangish flame warming the palm of his hand as he used it as a protection against the chilly wind.

He felt lonely.

It didn't matter that he had Dustin, because Dustin had Ceci. It didn't matter that he had Tina, because, fuck, she was more than good, really, she was fantastic and all, but... she wasn't Eleven.

His mother was miles away and he barely talked to his sisters nowadays. He kept his mind busy with classes and essays and stupid projects, but... deep down, he felt lonely. And he didn't use to feel

like this.

“Okay, who would you marry, kiss or kill: Pennywise the Clown, Freddie Kruger, or Jason Voorhees,” Eleven had challenged him one lazy night, when everything was still okay. She had been in his bed, sharing joint after joint with him, and had had this Eleven-smile on her face that made him so happy (it was one of the most beautiful smiles he had ever seen on someone). She had looked so pretty that night. Her hair had been a mess and she had this glow... This fucking glow that drove Mike into wanting to kiss her non-stop.

Mike took a long drag, held on to the smoke in his throat and, at last, exhaled it.

Marry, kiss or kill. They loved giving that kind of challenges to each other. The worse, the better. Making each other cringe with their answers, laugh or say, ‘fuck this, it’s too easy’. Mike missed that so much.

He never got around to answer that particular round of Marry, Kiss or Kill. He had been too disgusted with the options: famous monsters from horror movies. How could he pick?

But Eleven had an answer...

She always did.

Mike smiled to himself, thinking about all the times – and they were countless – that Eleven surprised him. That was why he loved to play those kind of challenges, from Marry, Kiss and Kill to Would You Rather, with her. She was always up to them, no matter how gross they got.

Tina didn’t like them. She thought they were a bit silly, but didn’t mind that Mike liked them. Sometimes she would laugh when Mike and Dustin played a round of Would You Rathers, but she never joined in.

Pennywise The Clown. Freddy Kruger. Jason Voorhees.

Eleven had an answer for that.

So, if she had an answer, then he had to have one too. He had to give her one.

“Hey.”

Mike looked behind his shoulder. His mouth fell open as he saw Eleven approach him, dressed in tight, black jeans and a baby-blue crop-top. She had her arms wrapped around herself, her hands rubbing her cold arms. When she sat down next to him, Mike saw goosebumps all over her skin and gave her his coat without hesitation.

“Thanks,” she muttered and put on the coat.

Next, Mike offered her the joint. Eleven smiled and accepted it.

They didn’t talk.

Mike didn’t remember the last time he was this close to Eleven. Had it been when they talked at the coffee shop? Or when they were at a party drunk and went to the bathroom together?

God, what they had done that night... That had been cheating. Mike had felt disgusted with himself. Not because he had been with Eleven (he would never regret being with her), but because he had done it even though he had accepted to be in a relationship with Tina. What kind of person was he, then?

Eleven gave the joint back and he accepted it quietly.

Even though you could almost feel the drunk buzz radiating from their bodies, you also knew, without a doubt, that they were feeling the soberest. Sitting down next to each other, sharing body temperature and glancing at each other like two shy kids in the playground who had a crush on each other, Mike and Eleven did not feel drunk at all. Or, at least, not in the way they had been inside the party.

It was nervous-wrecking, being so close to each other, while agonizing, awkward silence filled the void between them.

They didn’t use to be like this.

It didn't use to hurt or feel awkward.

Mike had to do something to change it. He had to give something to Eleven, let her be his best friend again, see her smile at him and talk.

God, he even missed her voice.

"I got it," Mike suddenly said.

Eleven blinked, confused.

"Got what?"

"Marry, kill or kiss: Pennywise The Clown, Freddy Kruger and Jason Voorhees," he stated, motioning with his hand as he said each option.

Eleven looked at him, a small smile stretching in her lips.

"Tell me."

Mike gave her the joint and sat up straight, turning his body to her. Eleven knew he had just got into his 'I'm being extra serious, so hear me out' mode.

"I would kiss Jason because he has a mask, so, technically... I wouldn't actually have to kiss him on the lips, which is nice." Eleven smiled at that. "I would kill Pennywise The Clown because he's like this eternal thing or whatever, right? And he hurts children. A lot. So yeah. And I would marry Freddy Kruger because one, I wouldn't be killed in my dreams since I would be his husband, and two, who says I have to have sex with him, right?" Mike claimed, finishing his big, rational argument, and watched for Eleven's reaction.

The girl took a long drag of the joint and passed it on to him. Only after the smoke was exhaled that she smiled and nodded, approving.

"That's a good one."

"Yeah?" Mike grinned. "What would be your answer?"

Eleven licked her lips before answering, "I would kill Freddy Kruger and marry Pennywise the Clown. But I would still choose to kiss

Jason for that same reason.”

“And why the other two?”

Eleven shrugged.

“I don’t like nightmares. Freddy Kruger is made of nightmares, basically, so ... yeah. That’s why.”

Mike nodded slowly, understanding.

“But Pennywise turns into your biggest fears,” he argued.

“Yeah, but... I don’t know. I just... Freddy scares me more.”

Once again, silence took a seat between them and they let it spoke its agonizing quietness as they avoided each other’s eyes.

The joint died shortly after, so Mike crushed it on the dirty road, and they both felt like the end had come. *This is it*. They had nothing else to say to each other. Nothing else to do in each other’s company.

A couple of girls walked by them, holding each other’s hands as they sung drunk and tuneless, *“Cause I got issues, but you got ‘em too. So give ‘em all to...”*

They watched them walk away.

“Isn’t your boyfriend looking for you?” Mike asked out of blue, his eyes still on the girls that had just passed by. In the corner of his eyes, he could see Eleven had had painted her lips tonight and they were tempting him.

“He hasn’t called, so I’m assuming no, he isn’t.”

Mike licked his lips before biting the bottom one.

It was awkward. It shouldn’t be.

He wished he could make it better.

“I miss you,” Eleven confessed.

That didn't make it any better, but relief drowned Mike and he smiled softly.

"I miss you too."

At least, they seemed to be on the same page.

"Is everything alright, you know, in... your life?" Mike asked, cursing himself for being so nervous.

Eleven nodded.

"Everything's fine. With yours?"

"Same old. Nothing changes."

Even though everything had changed.

"I've... heard about Max," he confessed.

Eleven glanced at him.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah... She's happy?" He asked.

Eleven nodded.

"That's good," he muttered and looked away.

A chilly breeze caressed his naked arms and tried as much as he could to stop himself from shivering in front of Eleven.

"Do you-" Eleven seemed to hesitate -"Do you want to call an uber? I feel like going home."

Yes. A million times yes.

"I have to go find Tina..." Mike ended up saying. He couldn't just leave the girl drunk at a party.

Eleven nodded.

“I guess I’ll look for Sean.”

She stood up and was about to walk back to the party when she stopped, turned back and took off Mike's coat.

“Thank you,” she said as she gave it back to him. Then, she walked away.

Mike was lonely again.

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments will make my day.

P.S. STRANGER THINGS TRAILER JUST KILLED ME.

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, everyone!

I'm sorry I didn't reply to your comments, but I read them all and they all made me smile so much.

College is a pain in the ass, so I only got the time to finish this chapter now and post it.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize. I didn't have time - or patience - to re-read it carefully. I've been sick all week.

Songs mentioned in this chapter:

Fair-Weather Friend by Bruno Major

Drunk in Love by Beyoncé feat Jay-Z

November, 6th. Monday. 16:22

Sean had been avoiding her and Eleven didn't know why.

After she went back to the party last Saturday, she looked for Sean everywhere but didn't find him. She tried to call him, but he never picked it up. At a certain point, his phone was turned off. Eleven ended up going home with Ceci, who kindly gave her shelter after Dustin noticing that his friend was in trouble and on the verge of crying (she didn't have the uber application and was too far away from the dorms to walk back alone).

Eleven wanted to be angry at Sean, she truly did because who the fuck leaves his girlfriend all by herself at some random party and then rejects her calls and messages for two days? -, but, funnily enough, her mind refused to react against him like that. It almost told her, *No, Eleven, if he's doing this, it's because something bad has happened*. So, she couldn't find in herself to be mad at him.

"But two days," Eleven complained out of blue, catching Max and Lucas' attention. "He hasn't said anything in two days! What should I

assume from that?”

Lucas and Max shared a worried look.

The three of them had gathered at a small coffee shop near the dorms to study and work on their individual essays – something that was slowly killing each one of them. Until that moment, everything had been quiet, all of them focused on their work. Empty cups of coffee and dirty cupcake plates were placed in the middle of the roundish table while the rest of it was occupied with books and laptops. Max had pulled her hair together in a messy ponytail and Eleven kept biting her nails, something that the other two had assumed it was because of the essay she was working on. But, as it turned out, the girl was once again wondering about her boyfriend’s weird behaviour.

“I don’t know what to say, Ellie,” Max confessed. Under the table, she reached for Lucas’ hand. “Maybe you should go to his place and demand a face-to-face conversation?”

Eleven’s first reaction to Max’s suggestion was to hesitate. Then, she realized that she should have done that already. How come she hadn’t thought of it? If Sean was ignoring her, then she should have gone after him.

He is free on Monday afternoons, she remembered.

Quickly, all her things were shoved inside her bag and barely understanding ‘goodbyes’ were shared among the group before Eleven left the coffee shop and almost ran to next bus stop.

After paying for her ticket, Eleven found a seat next to an old lady who was carrying three bags of groceries. She grabbed her phone and thought about sending Sean a text, but quickly forgot the idea and grabbed her head-phones instead to listen to some music. If Sean knew she was coming, he would probably pretend he wasn’t home and not answer the door.

Eleven really tried to understand what had happened; what had gone wrong between the two of them for Sean to act like this. A small part of her wanted to believe it had nothing to do with her; maybe Sean

was going through some bad shit and wanted some space, to be on his own while he figured things out. But, even if that was the case, wasn't she his girlfriend? Wasn't she supposed to be a shoulder to cry on or someone to pull him up when he went down?

When Eleven got to the building where Sean lived, gripping her phone with her right hand and holding her bag on her left shoulder, she stopped to take a deep breath. She hated touchy conversations and confronting people. She had awfully hated it when she had to do it with Mike and wasn't ready to go a second round, this time with Sean.

Eleven took the elevator to the fourth floor, walked up to her boyfriend's apartment door and knocked twice.

It took him a while to open. When he did, Sean's eyes went wide-opened and his mouth turned into a small 'o' of shock. Then, his entire expression changed and anger filled his brownish eyes while his hand turned into a tight fist.

"Ele-

"We need to talk, don't we?" She interrupted, trying to act tough. Deep down, she was scared and worried. "Please, Sean. Let's talk."

Her boyfriend took a second to consider her words and then moved aside, letting her in.

"Your roommates aren't home?" She asked, seeing the empty living-room and a few dirty bowls on the coffee table.

"Still in classes," Sean replied and motioned with his hand to his bedroom.

When he got there, he asked her to close the door as he moved to sit on his bed. Eleven took a seat on his desk chair, turning it in his direction. She put her bag down next to her feet.

"So," Eleven started, nervous, "can you tell me what's wro-

"Let's cut the bullshit here, Jane." Sean leaned forwards, resting his elbows on his knees. Eleven frowned. "I've been thinking a lot, okay?"

These two days –“He opened his mouth in hesitation .-“ I’ve been so fucking angry. Angry like... I don’t know if I ever like this before, to be honest. But I’ve tried to pull myself together and think carefully. I don’t want to be angry at you, or ruin whatever we have... But something has upset me. So, I’m going to ask you something and you’re going to be hundred per cent honest with me, okay? One hundred per cent, Jane.”

Eleven gulped and nodded.

“Have you ever slept with Mike?” Sean asked. “And I don’t mean as ‘sharing a fucking bed like two nice friends’, no. I mean, have you fucked him?”

Eleven’s first instinct was to lie. Sean couldn’t know about her and Mike. He would never trust her around him.

Yet, something in her told her that if Sean was making this question, it was because he already knew the answer. Or, at least, he was suspicious.

Trying to keep herself together, Eleven finally nodded, confirming Sean’s suspicions.

“And why-“ Sean rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands before looking at her, mad –“Why didn’t you tell me? I’m your boyfriend. Aren’t we supposed to tell each other this kind of shit?”

“I-“

“You what?” Sean interrupted. He stood up, frustrated. “Fuck, Jane. He... He is a constant in your fucking life. I knew, from the first day, how important he was to you. But I thought it was as a friend!”

“And it is!” Eleven exclaimed. It didn’t matter that it was a lie now because, when they first started seeing each other, it had been true. She had thought Mike was important as her best friend, not as... not as someone she was in love with.

“Well, then, it isn’t to him!” Sean spat out.

Eleven was baffled.

“W-what?”

“He fucking came on to me on the party. He fucking told me to-“ Sean bit his tongue, trying to calm himself up. “He fucking made it clear that he was upset over us being together, Eleven.”

Eleven. He called her Eleven. That was good. He was less angry.

Suddenly, her mind assimilated what Sean had said. Mike made it clear that he didn't want her and Sean together?

Eleven laughed.

Sean frowned.

“Are you laughing?”

“Yeah-“ Eleven giggled. “I am. I'm sorry, it's just-“ She shook her head, trying to find a serious expression. “You misread him.”

Because there was no way – no freaking way – that Mike could feel, what?, jealous of her relationship with Sean. Or was it threatened? God, she couldn't even find the right word to describe it.

Sean shook his head and sat down on his bed again.

“I'm serious. If you don't want to believe it, fine. But I know what I heard and what I saw in his face when he talked to me.”

All traces of nervous laughter in Eleven's body left. She stared at Sean, solemn.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “I'm sorry you feel that way.”

Sean closed his eyes for a second. He took a deep breath before facing her again.

“I just... I want you to tell me that... that you don't feel that way about him. That you guys were... together, but there were never feelings.”

Eleven half-smiled, sad.

“And what? If I say no, everything will be fine?”

Sean shook his head.

“No. You still lied to me. But... At least, I’ll know we’re fine. The two of us.”

Eleven nodded, understanding.

“So?” Sean pushed. “What is the answer?”

Tell him the truth.

But what for? What good would it make right now?

Sean might believe Mike felt something for Eleven – either that something was friend- jealousy or love -, but she was the one that knew her best friend the longer; that had been with him for the past three years in the most intimidating way (and no, she didn’t only mean sex). Eleven knew Mike better than she knew herself. There was no way he felt what she felt for him.

So, there was no point in telling Sean the truth. She would just end up hurting both of them and get nothing out of it.

“No,” Eleven said. “I don’t feel that way about him.”

November, 10th. Friday. 19h01.

“But why not?” Tina insisted.

Mike sighed.

“Because, Tina, I don’t feel like going out.”

Mike was sprawled out on his bed, already in his pyjamas, and with his laptop ready to start an episode of *Riverdale* (because, for some fucking reason, Ceci had challenged him to watch that show and he didn’t want to back off from it, no matter how cringe some scenes were). He had had a shitty day, starting by a night of bare sleep and

the upstairs' neighbours fighting at seven am. Then, classes had been just awful. He had to deliver a two-people presentation which had gone terribly wrong since the other guy tried to show himself off, hardly letting Mike talk.

Mike had barely eaten all day, and right now all he wanted to do was watch a fucking episode of a stupid TV show and go to sleep. Even though, you know, it was seven pm.

"But Mike..." Tina whined in her cute, little voice.

"I'm sorry, Tina," Mike apologized. "I really don't want to go out tonight."

Finally, Tina caved in. They said their goodbyes and Mike sighed in relief, throwing his phone somewhere on his bed. He started the episode of Riverdale and listened to Cole Sprouse's voice being all dramatic and stuff about the freaking town the show was called after.

Not even ten minutes into the episode, there was a knock on Mike's bedroom door and Dustin's head popped up behind the door. His friend had a goofy smile on his face.

Mike sighed.

"What?"

"Ceci just called and-"

"Did Tina call her?"

Dustin nodded.

"Then, I don't want to hear it," Mike stated, changing his positions so he was laying on his side, an arm being used as a pillow to his head.

Dustin sighed and walked in the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

"Man, listen -" he approached the bed and sat down -", Tina is worried."

Mike frowned and asked, "About what?"

Dustin scratched his chin, nervous.

"I... Well... What she told Ceci was that... you have been acting weird."

One of Mike's eyebrows raised up. Confusion was all written on his eyes.

Mike, acting weird?

"I'm just tired," he answered. "If she can't understand that..."

"She can and she does," Dustin said. Then, he wrinkled his nose. "At least, that what Ceci said? Anyway, she says you act weird because of the way you talk to her."

Mike was still baffled with the information.

"I've been talking to her like I've always talked," he spitted out, upset.

Dustin raised his hands in surrender. "Man, I don't know. I'm just the middle-man here, okay?"

Mike sighed, paused the episode and moved to lay on his back. He didn't know what else to say to Dustin. He was tired, his head acted like it was going to explode any time and all he wanted was to cuddle something. Well, someone. And that someone wasn't Tina.

"But, you know," Dustin started nervously, "Tina has a point."

Mike blinked.

"What do you mean?"

Dustin turned his body to Mike, pulling one leg up on the bed.

"Listen, I know you've been stressed over classes, okay? So have I. But... yeah, sometimes you do act weird. Like, you aren't actually here? You're moping a bit... And it isn't because you're tired. I've

seen you tired a thousand times,” Dustin tried to explain. He cleared his throat, uncomfortable, before adding, “So..., try to see what’s wrong?”

Mike’s only response was to nod, a small, unspoken promise to check himself.

“Good,” Dustin said and stood up. “I’ll be in my bedroom, if you need me.”

“Thanks,” Mike muttered.

Dustin left, closing the door behind him.

Mike looked back at his laptop’s screen, which had turned black.

He didn’t know what to do anymore; not since that night at the party with Eleven. How awkward it all had been. How bad it sucked when she left to find Sean. That was on him, sure, Mike knew that, but... it still fucking hurt.

He just wanted it to stop hurting.

This hadn’t been their deal.

Drunk kissing each other at parties was. Making out with each other because they had no else was too. Sleeping with each other because, as friends, they trusted each other that much, yeah, sure, also that.

But hurt? Pain? Awkwardness? Falling apart as friends?

No, Mike couldn’t handle that.

What can you do to change it?

No, better: what will you do to change it?

Because one thing was true: if Mike didn’t do something, if he didn’t act, he and Eleven would keep falling apart more and more. One day, they would be strangers to each other.

Mike couldn’t live in a world like that.

Filled with a sudden suffocating fear - a feeling that he had to do something now or nothing would ever go back to the way it was before -, Mike got up from his bed, closing his laptop's screen, and moved to find a pair of sneakers to put on. He also grabbed a warm winter jacket, remembered to shove his phone in a pocket and left the apartment without telling Dustin anything.

He made his way to the campus, to where Eleven lived alongside with Max. It was a ten-minute walk to there and Mike knew his way even with his eyes closed, having made that journey too many times in the past few years.

Looking up to the dark sky, he could see there were no stars shining. That could only mean one thing: the sky was covered in clouds and anytime soon a pouring rain would fill the streets. He had to be quick.

Halfway through his walk, he grabbed his phone and called Eleven. For the first time in what seemed like forever, Mike was calling his best friend. He just hoped she would pick up.

The ringing stopped. There was a click and then, "Mike?" in a soft voice.

"I'm on my way to your dorms. Come outside, please."

"Mike-"

"Please, El. I need to talk to you."

There was a quiet moment.

"Okay."

When Mike reached the campus' propriety, Eleven was already by the sidewalk, wrapped in a cosy, wool jacket and her hair done in a long braid. She looked tired and, upon seeing Mike approaching her, a flicker of concern shone in her brown eyes.

"Mike," she said as he stopped in front of her. "What's wrong?"

Mike opened his mouth to reply, but words got stuck in his throat.

This was the same girl that transferred to Hawkins when she was fifteen. The same girl that had to sit next to him and be his English partner for a year. The girl he had slowly become friends with because one look at her and he knew he wanted her in his life.

“This wasn’t the deal we had,” Mike finally spoke.

Eleven blinked, confused.

“It hurts, El,” Mike kept going, tears crowding in his eyes. “Why does it fucking hurt?”

His best friend almost smiled at his words; a kind of sad, desperate smile and an automatic reaction to the words he had just spoken.

Why did it fucking hurt?

That was the question of the century, wasn’t it now?

“You came all the way here to ask me that?” Eleven questioned. There was amusement in her voice. It was almost raining cats and dogs and Mike had walked all the way to the dorms just to... What, acknowledge that something was wrong between them? That something hurt and they kept doing nothing about it? That they were both clearly hiding something from each other?

“I had to,” Mike said, feeling desperate. “I mean-“

“Go home, Mike,” Eleven asked gently.

“No, El!” He exclaimed. He took a few steps back, a hand on his hair tugging it in frustration. He didn’t know what to say or what to do. He had been so freaking comfortable back home, watching a stupid TV show and suddenly, ... suddenly he had to come see her. He had to ask her.

“It wasn’t meant to hurt!” Mike screamed out of blue, approaching her again. A storm was breaching in the sky. There was lightning and life couldn’t get more alike a fucking Hollywood movie. But here they were. “So why does it hurt, El? Why?”

Eleven frowned. Why was he demanding answers from her? Why

wasn't he giving her some too? He wasn't the only one feeling the pain. God, he wasn't the only one feeling the consequences of their friendship crumbling.

Eleven closed her eyes, tightened her arms around her torso, feeling cold, and took a deep breath before looking at Mike again.

"Do you remember how Mrs. Carlton made us watch that movie My Best Friend's Wedding in English class?" Eleven asked him.

"Yeah," Mike confirmed, confused.

"It was the first movie we ever saw together," she remarked.

Mike nodded, remembering how boring he had first found the movie until Eleven explained to him how heart-breaking it actually was. Who would want to see the person they loved marrying someone else?

"What about it?" Mike asked.

Eleven's lips curled into a sad smile, her eyes lifeless.

"I feel my life is that movie ever since you started dating Tina," she confessed.

There. She had said it. She couldn't be more obvious.

Mike was frozen on his place, staring at her with wide-opened eyes.

Eleven snorted a humourless chuckle as she came to the realization that Mike would not give her what she wanted, not even a decent reaction, and shook her head, defeated.

"I'm sorry for that. I truly am, Mike."

Before he could say anything, before he could demand a deeper explanation, Eleven turned around and walked away.

She always walked away and he kept letting her.

Why did he do it?

Why couldn't he react when it was necessary?

A thick drop of rain fell over Mike's forehead, running down his nose, touching lips and then dying right before it reached his chin.

She was sorry. Why was she sorry?

Why aren't you sorry?!

Mike walked back home. It started pouring, the thick drops of water hitting his head, trying to call his attention to the fact they were there and they were going to ruin his hair, damp his clothes and leave him shivering in cold. But Mike didn't care.

All he could see in front of his eyes was Eleven. Eleven on his bed, Eleven smiling at him, Eleven talking and laughing, watching movies with him, singing to him, getting drunk... Kissing him. Whispering stupid things in his ear to make him chuckle.

"I don't believe in marriage, Mike," Eleven confessed one afternoon where they had been laying on his bed, studying together. It had been senior year. "I've seen what it has done to my mother. But that doesn't mean I don't believe in love, you know? Because the world is such a big place. There has to be people worth falling in love with, don't you think?"

Was he worth it?

Was he good enough to be loved by her?

Mike got to his building and stopped by the door. He rang his apartment's number and waited.

"Hello?"

"It's me," he said to Dustin.

"Dude, you left?"

Mike closed his eyes for a second and leaned against the door.

"Yeah. Please, open."

There was a buzzing sound and Mike pushed the door. He walked up the three flights of stairs and then crossed the hallway to his apartment's door. Dustin was standing there, waiting for him.

"Where did you go?" He asked, concerned.

"Somewhere. I'm going to take a shower."

Mike went to his bedroom, grabbed a couple of fresh clothes and locked himself in the bathroom. In there, he undressed himself, grabbed his phone and put on Spotify. He turned the volume up until nothing could be heard but the songs playing and the shower's stream.

As the first drops of warm water hit his face, Mike took a deep breath, his entire body shaking.

His ears captured the song's lyrics.

My fair-weather friend

I wish you could see

He'll never love you

Quiet like me

He didn't recognize it, but its humming melody was familiar. (You know how it is like, when you hear something that triggers something in your mind, but you don't know what it is.)

Mike barely washed himself, rather spending the time under the water standing still. His body was warming up and he felt himself relax even though his mind was fighting a thousand of thoughts.

Eleven's reference to the first movie they ever saw together hadn't been random, not at all. Mike was very aware of that, yet a part of him was scared. He was slowly coming to realize what all those years with her had meant. What they still meant. And what he, deep down,

wished they still would mean in the future.

But what future?

She had apologized. And he had let her walk away.

Another song started playing and, when Beyoncé's voice made itself heard, Mike realized that he had accidentally put on Eleven's playlist.

He had completely forgotten that she had made a playlist on his Spotify account. How ridiculous was it? No, better: how ironic was it that, from all the nights he could have chosen her playlist to listen, he had accidentally picked it tonight? His subconscious was stabbing him in the back.

We woke up in the kitchen saying

"How the hell did this shit happen?"

One year ago, right after classes ended, they all had gone out to drink. Dustin had gone back with Max to the dorms and Eleven took a cab with Mike back to the flat. They hadn't made it to his bedroom, ending up making love to each other in the kitchen.

Making love.

Mike closed his eyes and tilted his head back, accepting the furious drops of warm water on his face.

He had never used that expression – 'making love' – when referring to what he and Eleven had had. Yet, it made sense.

It made so freaking sense.

After a couple of songs, Mike finally got off the shower. He dried himself with a blue towel that he hadn't noticed, but belonged to Dustin, and then dressed himself in a pair of grey sweatpants and an old t-shirt. A t-shirt, he realized as soon as he looked at himself in the mirror, that Eleven used to wear when she slept over.

Fuck. Everything in his life was connected to her. And he was the one that made it that way.

Yes, they were best friends.

Yes, they had been sex buddies.

But having their lives intertwined this deep with one another had only happened because they both allowed it. He wasn't like this with Dustin and certainly Eleven wasn't like this with Max.

What did all this mean?

You know what it means, a small voice told him.

Mike left the bathroom's door open wide so the stifling air produced by the shower's heat could dissipate faster. On his way to his bedroom, he was met with Dustin, who was peeking from the living-room's entrance with a concerned look.

"Dude," Mike sighed as he passed by and walked in his bedroom.

Dustin followed him.

"What's wrong? Where did you go?"

Mike threw himself onto his bed and crawled his way to the side near the wall. He sat down, grabbed a pillow to his lap and leaned his head against the wall. Then, he sighed.

"Mike?" Dustin called, worried.

Mike glanced at his friend, mute.

"What's wrong?" Dustin asked, leaning against the doorway.

Mike hesitated (Should he say it out loud? Should he confront his feelings like this?) before saying, "I'm in love."

Dustin frowned.

"Well, that's good, right? You have a girlfriend who clearly—"

“Not with her.”

“Oh,” Dustin looked down for a second before shaking his head slowly. “Now you realize that?”

Mike blinked, temporarily confused as his brain assimilated Dustin’s statement.

“Now? What do you mean ‘now’?”

Dustin half-smiled, a bit sympathetic for his best friend.

“Dude, come on. Are you going to tell me that it isn’t Eleven you are talking about?”

Mike kept staring at Dustin without speaking.

“I know, Mike,” Dustin nodded. “I’ve always known. Everyone has. You two were the only ones too blind to see. And *now*, now you see? Now that you are seeing Tina and she is with Sean? What a fucking timing, Wheeler.”

There was a moment of quiet between the two of them.

“So,” Mike started, “it’s too late?”

Dustin sighed. “I don’t know, man. I really don’t.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments and kudos are welcomed.

12. Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't even know what to say.

Enjoy the chapter. It's a bit Rated M - not too much since I'm so busy with everything, I honestly don't have the inspiration to write good smut scenes.

Songs used:

Reminding me - Shawn Hook ft Vanessa Hudgens

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize.

November, 11th. Saturday. 00:13

Mike didn't know what he was doing. He was shitfaced, accepting drinks from strangers and taking shots with people he supposedly knew (at least, they were greeting him with hugs and kisses, so he was assuming they were acquaintances), but had no idea who they fucking were in the state he was.

Ceci had convinced him and Dustin to go out. It didn't matter if his girlfriend was mad at him. Well, not mad, but rather upset. Mike had declined all her offers to hang out during the last week and now she was clearly refusing to take another step into trying to reach him. She was done going after him when he clearly didn't want to be bothered by her. At least, that was what Ceci had told him at the beginning of the night. But Mike didn't care. He just wanted to drink until he couldn't even remember his own name.

Things weren't working out between the two of them, no matter how much he tried to remind himself that Tina was his two-year crush and supposedly the girl of his dreams. (When did he decide she was the girl of his dreams? Why did he decide he had to have one? And why wasn't 'the girl of his dreams' someone else?)

"Should you still be drinking?" A random guy – someone from his course – asked after finding him in the bathroom line, stealing a cup

of vodka with lemon juice - Eleven loved that drink - from someone.

“Yeees,” Mike dragged the word. “Yes, I should.”

The guy gave him an ‘it’s your funeral’ kind of look before walking away.

Mike fell back against the wall, his head bashing against it loudly. Someone winched for him, but he felt no pain. That was the beauty of being super drunk: you barely felt anything, only the need to keep drinking until you could no longer hold your liquor.

“You’re being ridiculous,” the girl he had stolen the drink from said. “You’re going to throw up.”

“And let me throw up!” Mike snapped.

No one understood why he was so focused on getting black-out drunk. Well, maybe Dustin did, but of course didn’t approve.

It was El.

His El.

He loved her more than anyone in this world and he had lost her. He had let her walk away too many times, even after she gave him all the signs in the world that she wanted something more than friendship. He let her leave.

It was all his fault.

And now Tina was upset, and he didn’t feel like doing anything to change that. He wanted her to be upset.

“Because, if she is mad at me, then I don’t have to talk to her or see her,” Mike explained to a random girl who had joined the bathroom line after him.

The girl seemed to be really into his story.

“I get you,” she replied as the line moved. They were almost at the door. “My friend has this boyfriend who is always so mad at her, for,

like, no reason. It's ridiculous."

Mike frowned, confused, wondering where his story and the girl's friend's story matched.

Finally, his turn to pee arrived. After he was done, not forgetting to flush (too many years hearing his older sister yelling at him for not flushing eventually paid off), Mike spent five minutes with his hands under the cold water as he stared at himself in the mirror. He was finding his freckles quite weird tonight, too noticeable against his pale skin. They were everywhere.

Why did he have so many freckles?

No one liked him before because of them. And his nose. And the way he laughed. Girls in seventh grade were mean. Eighth graders were worse. But he managed to keep going. He had had Dustin on his side, someone who girls weren't into, but, in his favour, he wasn't into them as well. Younger Dustin had been a role model: he was who he was, never caring about the social standards or goals of life. So what you should have already kissed a girl before you hit puberty? So what you should lose your virginity before going off to university? So what you should have a first love during your teen years? Why, but why should you have those things? And why did they have a deadline?

At some point of his life, Mike had wished to be more like his friend Dustin. Now, now he knew who he was and was happy. Well, as happy as someone who was clearly drinking his way to death in order not to think about his feelings could be.

Mila Tonya, Mike suddenly reminded. She was his first kiss. He had been fifteen when it happened. And it happened a few months before he got to meet Eleven.

Sometimes, deep down, he wished he had waited for her.

God, his mind was always going back to El. El here, El there, El laughing, El crying. *Everything* was El.

Mike brought his wet hands to his eyes and rubbed them with his palms, taking deep breaths at the same time. He felt extra dizzy due

to the friction his hands caused against his eyes and, when he opened them again, it took him a few seconds of blinking to see clearly again.

He was a mess.

Mike left the bathroom, bumping into a couple of people on his way to the living-room area. He didn't know whose house this was. Who had invited him and his group of friends to come? Who were these people around him that kept greeting him happily?

All he wanted was Eleven and she wasn't here.

What if he called her?

"Mike, man," Dustin showed up out of blue as he was getting his phone from his jeans' pocket. "What are you doing?"

"Calling El."

"Mike-"

"No!" Mike interrupted, screaming drunk and loudly. "I want to talk to her. I'm going to talk to her, Dustin!"

Dustin held his hands up and nodded.

"Okay, man, okay. Just -" he pointed to the front door -"do it outside, yeah? More privacy."

If Mike were soberer and thinking clearer, he would know Dustin's advice had to do with the fact that the party was full of Tina's acquaintances, and how bad it would be if they overheard Tina's boyfriend talking to a girl on the phone and heard how desperate he was for her attention. But Mike was too drunk to notice any subtle hints.

"Okay," Mike agreed calmly, holding his hands up as well. "Okay, I'm going."

Clumsy, Mike found his way out of the small house and walked down the propriety until he reached a public bench. He sat down, looked at

his phone's screen and thought for a second about his drunk decisions.

Why should he do it? Well, because he wanted to talk to Eleven, of course.

But should he do it? Well, no. But he wanted to.

His finger swiped down his contact list until he found Eleven's name: *El my girl*. He clicked on it, calling her.

It rang for a few seconds. Then, a click-sound was heard, and Eleven's tired voice said, "Mike, what is it?"

"I miss you," he confessed straightaway. "Why do I miss you?"

There was a sigh.

"Why do you keep doing this?"

Mike frowned, confused, and then changed topics, "Do you like my freckles?"

There was some sort of hesitation on the other side of the line before Eleven replied, "Are you serious right now? Mike, it's one am. I was sleeping."

"But it's one am," Mike frowned. "On a Friday."

"Yeah, I've been tired."

"Why?" Mike asked, worried.

Eleven sighed.

"School, of course." There was a quiet moment. "Shouldn't you be enjoying your party with Tina?"

"Tina isn't here," Mike snapped. "She's mad at me. Like, everything is my fault." He didn't know why he said those things. Was it to make the scenario sound worse than it actually was? Was it to capture Eleven's attention?

“Why is she mad?” Eleven asked, a bit more awakened.

“I don’t know- I mean, I do- El, you know, girls are weird.”

Eleven breathed down in a way that sounded like a chuckle.

“Yeah, I know. I’ve had to live as one for the past nineteen years.”

“I miss you,” Mike confessed again.

There was a pause, and, for that quiet second, Mike’s mind wandered to the fact that there were no cars in that street. Why were there no cars?

“Michael,” Eleven’s voice caught his attention again.

“Yes, El?”

“I need to go to bed.”

“Oh,” Mike sounded defeated. He wanted to talk to her.

“Have fun, okay?” Eleven wished.

“Okay.”

Mike ended up throwing up in the uber that Dustin had called for them, in the apartment’s building’s stairs, in the apartment’s hall and then in the bathroom – and no, it hadn’t been in the toilet. Dustin, who had to put up with all the vomit, with all Mike’s nonsense and whimpering, cursed his friend for life. He had told him to stop drinking. He had begged him to keep his voice down at the party because Mike, being the drunk idiot he was, had started going on about El. Ceci had overheard him, but Ceci was cool. She had always known Mike and Eleven were in love, but the rest of the people around them didn’t. So, Dustin had taken Mike out of there, had called an Uber and, oh boy, had deeply regretted his decision. He had to pay a fine to the driver now.

“Good Lord, Michael,” Dustin muttered as he threw his friend to the bed. Mike groaned a bit and moved to lay on his side.

Dustin looked around and found a small notebook. Grabbing a pen and tearing off a blank paper, he left Mike a note.

Don't drink your feelings away, Wheeler. She wouldn't want that.

There was no need to say who 'she' was. There was only one person that would make Mike feel like shit if she were to know how he had behaved that night.

November, 17th. Friday. 19h24

Eleven was patiently waiting for Sean to come pick her up. He had promised he would do it, even though he was already twenty minutes late.

Things weren't working out. Day after day, something showed up and made things worse. Sean and she were falling apart; their feelings – or, better saying, his feelings for her – weren't enough to keep them working for a future together.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Max asked for the tenth time that day.

Eleven looked over at her best friend, who was sitting on her bed next to a suitcase and a warm winter-jacket. She was waiting for Lucas to come by as well. They were going to Max's parents' house for a couple of days, finally facing them for the first time after finding out about the pregnancy. They had had to postpone their visit for another week since Lucas had had this huge oral presentation right before the weekend they had thought of going over. But now, there was nothing holding them back.

"Why wouldn't I, Maxie?" Eleven offered a forced smile.

"I don't know. Life seems so... weird, doesn't it?"

Eleven shrugged.

It had been a bit weird since Mike called her that rainy night two weeks ago and they met up in front of the dorms. When she had got back to the room, all her inner strength and pride had crumbled down into tears. She had spent the night in Max's bed with the girl comforting her.

It was suffocating, living like this. And yes, like Max said, weird. It felt like something was missing. Something was wrong.

Her phone buzzed. Sean sent a message saying he had arrived.

Eleven approached Max, hugged her and wished her good luck for her trip.

"Good luck to you, Ellie," Max replied with worry in her voice.

Eleven forced a smile upon her lips. "It'll be fine."

Sean wasn't in the greatest mood when she got in his car. In a dead, awful silence, they drove to a nearby restaurant.

Whose idea had it been to go out for dinner? Why did they even try? Sean couldn't even look at her (especially after someone told him they overheard Mike talking loud about Eleven at a party) and Eleven, even though she knew she shouldn't, was always going back to thinking about Mike, about how her life was before Tina and Sean.

Sean parked a few streets away from the place they had agreed to go to. Eleven looked at him, confused.

"I wouldn't have a place to park there. It's always full," Sean explained deadpan before opening the car's door and getting out.

Eleven followed him quietly.

The walk to the restaurant was awful as they avoided each other's eyes. The awkward aura that surrounded them made it all worse.

When they got there, they sat down in the first available table – didn't mind it was the one nearest to the bathroom -, and grabbed

two menus to keep themselves distracted from one another.

The waiter came by shortly after. Eleven ordered a tuna salad with extra mustard while Sean went for a hamburger and French fries. When he asked for a beer to drink, Eleven wondered for a second if she should too. She hadn't got drunk in a while and, truth be told, she missed it. She missed the taste of alcohol in her mouth because it meant one thing: the sober reality of how shitty her life was turning out to be would be gone. It wasn't like she was out of control when it came to drinking (she could hold her liquor just fine), but, let's be real, it helped a lot to just lose your tension and worries for a while. To dance throughout an entire night and feel like everything was okay.

"Jane," Sean called.

She blinked.

"Your drink?" He asked.

"Water, please."

It was tense after the waiter left. Eleven played with the napkin, avoiding Sean's face as he gazed around the restaurant, more interested in the people around them than in her.

It wasn't working out.

Why were they both here, forcing something that wasn't good for anyone?

Sean was living his life believing Mike was in love with Eleven and that was something that clearly upset him dearly.

Eleven was living her life being in love with Mike and knowing he would never feel that way about her. At least, he didn't show her real signs of it. Calling her drunk, going to her dorms at night... Friend Mike would do that for her. Friend Mike who knew something was wrong in their friendship would demand to know why it sucked when they were no longer in each other's lives on a daily-basis and would call her drunk just to tell her he missed her.

A Mike in love would be something different, right? If he were in love with her, wouldn't he admit it? Unlike him, she had given him real proof that she felt something. Fuck, that reference to the first movie they saw together? It was obvious. So freaking obvious.

Eleven glanced at Sean. He was staring at nowhere, clearly thinking about something too. He wasn't there. She wasn't there. Why were they keeping this act together? How good could it make them?

Why did she lie that day? Why did she tell Sean she didn't love Mike as more than a friend? To use him as a safe haven, as a way to ensure she didn't end up alone? Wasn't that just ridiculous?

Dinner was awkward. They barely spoke to one another and Eleven didn't feel like eating. She played around with her food, moving it between the fork and knife, and thinking about what to do.

It was pointless. All of it.

She had to say something.

"We need to talk," Sean suddenly said.

Eleven looked up, scared.

Sean wasn't even looking back. He was focused on dipping his French fry in mayonnaise.

Things weren't working out. They both knew it.

This was it.

"We need to break up," Eleven added.

Sean glanced at her and nodded. He took a bite of his French fry.

He didn't love her enough to keep trying. She didn't even love him. There was no point in keeping the act, in trying.

"We're better off on our own, aren't we?" Sean asked.

Eleven hesitated (she didn't want to hurt him) before nodding.

Sean's lips curled into a hopeless smile.

"I should have known," he said, shaking his head.

Eleven frowned and, before he could say anything more, she leaned forward and touched his hand.

"No, Sean. It's not your fault, it's—"

"Your fault?" Sean looked up, moving his hand away from hers. "Are you really using the 'it's not you, it's me' card?"

"It makes sense to use it," Eleven replied with honesty, sitting straight. She licked her lips, hesitant, before confessing, "I shouldn't have lied."

Sean raised an eyebrow.

"About Mike?"

Eleven froze for a second and then nodded.

"You like him," Sean stated.

Eleven gazed away while shrugging.

"I suppose."

Sean snorted cynically. "You suppose?"

"It's complicated."

She didn't want Sean to know how deep her feelings for Mike ran. God, she didn't even want herself to realize how deep in love she was, let alone her soon to be ex-boyfriend. Because Mike would never feel the same. He had Tina and she was just his friend.

Suddenly, Sean put down his fork and knife and grabbed his napkin to clean his mouth. Eleven stared at him in silence.

After taking a last sip from his beer, Sean spoke, "I guess this settles it, then. Maybe we should go?"

They paid for the meal separately.

The walk to the car and the drive to the dorms was a terrible quiet one. The tension between the ex-couple could be cut with a knife and anyone that saw them walking side to side, trying to avoid each other's personal space, just knew that there was something clearly wrong.

This was it.

Was she supposed to feel relief? Happier? She just felt like shit, noticing how red Sean's eyes were as he tried to spot himself from crying in front of her.

She had just hurt a good person. And for what? For whom?

He is worth it, you know it.

Yeah, he was. Mike Wheeler was worth the entire world. But what was the point of knowing that if he didn't love her back? If he went around calling her, coming to her dorms and all but never stopping her from walking away?

Sean turned the radio's volume on so that he could avoid the awkwardness in the car. Eleven sighed, thankful for his idea, and tilted her body towards the window, resting her head against it.

I'm tryna forget you

With all the regrets

But I'm still hanging onto

Eleven closed her eyes, taking in the lyrics of the random song. Why, why did the radio always know which songs to play to bother her heart?

She suddenly remembered to send Max a quick text, saying it was all over between her and Sean. *But don't worry, I'm fine*, she added in

last. It was a bit of a lie, but, honestly, why wouldn't she feel fine when she got home? Now, the awkward silence in the car was slowly driving her nuts, yet, as soon as Sean left, she would feel relief. Right?

They came to a stop after a while. Eleven looked at the dorms and then at Sean.

"Thank you for the ride," she said in a quiet tone.

Sean nodded without even looking at her.

Eleven got out of the car and Sean didn't hesitate in driving away.

Eleven stood still for a while, watching the car disappeared at the end of the road.

Relief didn't come to her. Actually, fear did. This was a change. A scary one. She hated changes because something new had to come and fill the void of the past thing, right? So, what could it be? What was the new thing that was going to pop out in her life?

Eleven didn't feel like being alone. Not when Max was miles away with Lucas. Not when Dustin was with his girlfriend and she... She couldn't go to Mike's and spend the night with him, like she used to do.

Her life had changed too much in just a few months.

She didn't have Mike nor Sean now. She didn't have anyone who had the time and patience to understand her.

It was for the best, really. Sean didn't deserve to be second in her heart. Now, she just had to face her feelings and put them behind her fast. She wasn't going to be with Mike.

He had Tina.

Her phone buzzed inside her jeans' back pocket. For a second, Eleven thought about ignoring it. She didn't feel like talking to anyone, even though she desperately wanted some company. Yet, she remembered it could be Max's reply to her message, so, she grabbed her phone,

hoping to read some supporting words.

Eleven froze upon seeing Mike's name flashing in the screen.

She opened it and stared at what he had sent.

Wheeler my boy

Tina and I are over.

Eleven's heart was hammering against her chest. Her breathing was suddenly stuck in her throat and she couldn't even blink. She re-read those words a dozen times.

Hadn't she just been ready to face the pain of her feelings? Hadn't she already accepted the loss of hope when it came to Mike?

Her all body was reacting against her now. Five little words had changed her entire belief system.

Mike and Tina were over.

She and Sean were over too.

Did this mean...?

Eleven turned around and started walk in the opposite direction of the dorms. She was walking fast, so fast that she barely noticed the cars stopping for her to cross the road. She dodged any person that came into her path, apologizing quickly if she accidentally hit someone's shoulder.

But she kept walking. Walking so fast she was almost running.

It was a ten-minute journey to Mike's place.

She made it in seven.

And, to her luck, someone was coming out of the building as she got there, letting the door open for her. She thanked the lady before

going to call for the elevator.

“Come on,” she muttered, watching the numbers go down until they reached the zero. She got in and clicked on the third floor.

Come on.

Finally, she came face to face with Mike’s door. She hesitated for a second, wondering if she should do it; if she should actually be here.

But that was what he meant by his message, right? That was what he wanted.

Eleven knocked on the door, her hands shaking.

She felt like throwing up. Her entire body was a huge nervous muscle.

Mike and Tina had broken up.

Mike had texted her.

Had it been a sign? It *had* to be a sign.

The door opened, revealing Mike.

Mike, who had sent her that message in a hopeless moment of fleeting courage, blinked, his mouth half-opened in surprise. She was actually here.

“El-“

“Sean and I are over,” Eleven told him.

Mike’s eyes went wide-opened and his breathing shook, lips trembling.

“W-what? You are?” She nodded. “Why?”

A tiny smile stretched across Eleven’s mouth.

“It wasn’t working out,” she admitted. “He wasn’t who I wanted...” She licked her lips, nervous. “Why did you break up with Tina?”

Mike took one step closer to her.

“She wasn’t the one I wanted too.”

Eleven’s smile widened as Mike started to smile as well. Hesitantly, his hand reached up and touched her cheek. She closed her eyes, enjoying the warmth of his palm. She hadn’t realized how much she had missed his touch until now. Nostalgia hadn’t made him justice.

“What does this mean?” Mike whispered, leaning forwards, his head tilting down in her direction.

Eleven gripped his elbow, stepping closer to him.

“Whatever we want it to mean?” She asked, hopeful.

After months of abstinence, like two junkies forced into rehab, Mike and Eleven’s lips finally touched.

The kiss was furious, passionate and full of love. Completely free of hiding feelings or lies.

Eleven managed to close the door as Mike pulled her inside the apartment. Her back hit the wall as her hands found Mike’s and their finger intertwined for just a few seconds – a few seconds that reassured each other that they were actually here.

Mike pulled away and his mouth moved down to kiss a desperate path from her chin to her collarbones, stopping for a bit on her neck, biting and teasing the skin there. Eleven moaned.

“Mike,” she murmured.

He licked her skin one last time before moving up, his eyes meeting hers.

“Yes?”

“Bedroom, please?”

Their clothes got lost along the way. Their sneakers left by the living-room’s entrance, Eleven’s coat on the floor alongside Mike’s t-shirt.

Their belts came off, weirdly enough, right before they entered Mike's bedroom and closed the door with a loud bang.

Eleven sat down on the edge of his bed before crawling her way to the middle of it, Mike following her on his knees, hovering over her with hungry eyes. Suddenly, Eleven's hand grabbed Mike's neck and pulled him down to a kiss. They fell on the bed together.

Mike's hands managed to unzip her jeans and pulled them all the way he could down her legs. Eleven's mouth detached itself and they opened their eyes.

"Take yours off too," she asked, talking about his jeans.

In record time, they were in their underwear, their hands intertwined, and their mouths glued to each other. They were panting, their gasping breaths and moans matching one another.

They had all night. All night to remember each other of how good it felt to be together.

Do you know how you suddenly find out this movie, or TV show or book, and you get addicted to it?

Eleven gasped as Mike's soft lip kissed her skin down from her neck to her chest, stopping to unclasp her bra.

Like, you are reading it and already dreading that it's going to be over, or you're so excited with a movie that you want to re-watch it the next day?

Eleven played with the elastic band in Mike's underwear, teasing him with her fingers dipping in and out from the piece of clothing.

Or when you're patiently waiting for the next season of that TV show you love the most, but you want it so badly that you go back to re-watch the previous seasons, and yet you're satisfied, but you're not?

Sex with Mike felt that way.

When they finally looked at each other, that last moment after Mike positioned himself, and nodded, agreeing to do this again, everything changed. The love pouring out of their eyes, the way their hands

were holding on to each other, said it all. They were in love. And, as Mike slid inside of her for the first time in months, there was an explosion of colour and feelings everywhere.

I remember this feeling, Eleven thought as her eyes met Mike's and they smiled at each other.

Mike went slow at first, his nose bumping into Eleven's as they swayed together in a rhythm they had long learned together.

"M-Mike," she gasped softly.

His lips met hers, his hands grabbed her waist and, suddenly, they changed positions, Mike sitting them up, Eleven wrapping her arms around his neck.

El's favourite sex position? Well, it really depends on her mood, but I'm pretty sure her favourite position is when she's on top. She likes to take control.

Eleven took control of their hips movements, speeding them up as her mouth fell open, moaning.

And, hey, I'm not complaining. I like it when she does.

Mike was looking up at her with utter adoration in his brown eyes.

Time stopped for them and moved too fast at the same time.

This was a change. A good change. A change that meant going back to the past, but bringing only the good things forwards.

"El?" Mike called, his voice hoarse. His hand moved to her back, his long fingers stroking her spine.

Eleven shivered, her eyes finding his.

"Yes?"

"I-" Mike's mouth stayed opened and he closed his eyes for a second, feeling overwhelmed with everything that was happening – "I love you."

Eleven's mouth broke into a smile. One of her hands gripped Mike's hair, making him open his eyes to look back at her.

"I love you too."

Notes for the Chapter:

Comments and kudos will make my day.

P.S. SEASON TWO WAS SO FREAKING GREAT.
OMG. MILEVEN'S REUNION RUINED ME. AAAAH.

13. Chapter 13

Notes for the Chapter:

At laaaast!

I hope you guys enjoy this last chapter. I hope it's what you were expecting (I've tried really hard to make it good, but life has been such a mess...)

Since this is only an epilogue, the scenes are going to be short; just a few sneak-peeks of the characters's lives after the end.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize. I didn't proof-read some parts since I didn't have time.

November, 18th. Wednesday. 2:32

They were half-awaken, half-asleep, laying in each other's arms, their tired eyes looking at each other in complete, utter adoration. Mike's hand played with Eleven's hair and her fingers traced the red scratches she had left over his chest and stomach. It was just like the old days. Yet, something was different; there was transparency now.

They had put on music to keep the room less quiet. It felt nice, to be in that room again, wearing nothing but underwear and listening to random songs on YouTube. Their clothes were scattered around the room.

Dustin hadn't come home yet, something they were both thankful since they knew their friend would have immediately started to complain about the noise. Or maybe he wouldn't. Maybe they would be off the hook this one time because finally – freaking finally – they weren't just using each other for sex or pretended no-feelings attached kind of thing, but rather loving each other.

How good it felt, to finally look at each other and feel love pouring down their eyes, their smiles, their hands...

They had no need for words. Eleven showing up at his door after he

had sent that message had been enough for the two of them. They had dated other people, but were clearly on the same page when it came to one another.

“We should sleep,” Mike muttered, leaning his forehead against hers.

Eleven raised her hand and touched his soft, red lips.

“Are you going to be here in the morning?” She asked.

“Well, it is my bedroom,” Mike joked.

Eleven hit his arm in a playful way, making him snort.

“I’m trying to be serious here, Michael.”

“I know.” Mike leaned in and kissed her softly before whispering against her lips, “Are you still going to love me in the morning?”

Eleven relaxed, smiled sweetly and nodded.

“Of course.”

“Then, I’ll be here. And you’ll be here.”

At three am, you would find Mike Wheeler and Eleven sleeping in each other’s arms.

At five am, Dustin Henderson would get home from his girlfriend’s place after the two had a fight and find two pairs of sneakers by his best friend’s door, recognizing them straightaway. His first thought would be, “*Fuck. These two are back at it again,*” before realizing that maybe not, maybe they finally worked things out.

At six am, Eleven would be sleeping on her back and Mike would be using her as his pillow, his head laying over her naked chest.

At seven am, they would wake up and make love to each other again.

At eight am, they would be missing class.

November, 30th. Thursday. 21:33

“Ceci and I broke up,” Dustin confessed out loud.

Mike and Eleven, who had been watching TV in silence, wrapped in blankets, and cuddling, looked to where Dustin was sitting, in the old armchair, with shocked faces.

“Why?” Mike asked.

“She-“ Dustin cleared his throat –“met someone new. A girl from Creative Arts.”

Mike and Eleven shared a worried glance.

A heart-broken Dustin was something they had rarely faced in their life since the boy was usually too much positive to be bother by those things. And, if they were to be honest, Ceci was perhaps the first girl Dustin had really liked. So, this was his first broken heart.

“And how are you feeling?” Eleven dared to ask. Under the blankets, Mike grabbed her hand. His thumb stroked the back of her hand gently.

“Fine,” Dustin said. “It hurts, but... it will pass, right? I mean, at least, she’s going to be happy.”

Eleven’s lips curled into a compassionate smile.

“Dude,” Mike called. Dustin looked over at him. “If everyone was like you, this world would be perfect.”

Dustin forced a smile.

“Thanks, man.”

December, 4th. Monday. 17:33

Eleven was surprised to open her room’s door and, instead of finding her redhaired roommate sprawled out on her bed, she found Lucas,

who, weirdly enough, was re-organizing the white desk that stood between the two beds.

“Hello there, Lucas.”

Lucas jumped, surprised.

“Oh, El. Hi.”

Eleven dropped the bag and books she had taken for her study session with Ceci on the bed. She knew it sounded weird – and Max had confirmed that last night – to hang out with one of her closest friends’ ex-girlfriends, but Eleven had to see how Ceci’s life was going because, one, Ceci had truly become a friend of hers, and, two, she wanted to see the girl in a post-breakup light. That was, did she regret ending everything with Dustin? Did she do the right thing when talking to Dustin? Were they cool? According to Ceci, yes, she knew she had hurt Dustin, but this girl – Abbi – was really special to her and she had tried her best to make Dustin understand that and make things okay between the two of them.

“What are you doing here?” Eleven asked Lucas.

“Oh, Max is taking a shower. She’s a bit in a bad mood today? So, I decided to clean the room for her. You know –“ he pointed to the small board of chores she and Max had hung on the wall above the desk – “, it’s her week to keep everything tidy, but, well, she isn’t having a great day and-“

“What’s wrong with her?”

Lucas pressed his lips together and looked down at his feet.

Eleven frowned.

“Lucas,” she said in a warning tone of voice. “What’s wrong with my best friend?”

Lucas sighed.

“We went to the doctor and...” He went quiet, his mouth left open.

“And what?” Eleven asked, freaking out.

“She’s having twins, actually,” Lucas confessed. “And we’re both freaking out with it, okay?”

Eleven’s mouth fell open. A part of her relaxed, her tense shoulders losing some of its stiffness, knowing that Max was okay – no health issues or whatsoever -, but... twins?

“How are you guys holding up?” She asked.

The room’s door suddenly opened, and Max showed up, wrapped in a comfy bathrobe, her red hair hanging wet over her shoulders. Eleven stared at her best friend for a second before she approached her and hugged her tightly.

“How are you feeling?” She asked, pulling back.

Max shrugged.

“I’m having twins. That’s how I’m feeling.”

December, 15th. Friday. 10:22

The bus ride was already getting too boring and they still had to face five hours of it. Dustin was snoring loudly in the seat next to Mike and Eleven, sitting with a curly-haired girl who had her laptop open and was watching a movie to pass the time. They had had their first bus break half an hour ago and they used the time to smoke a joint, which led to Dustin’s loud sleep.

“We could play a game,” Mike suggested in a quiet tone. They had a blanket wrapped around them and the armrest between the two seats had been pulled up so that they could cuddle with each other. Right now, Eleven’s legs were over Mike’s lap and he had one arm wrapped around her waist.

“Hum, ... Would you rather?” Eleven asked, tilting her chin up to look at her boyfriend.

Mike chuckled.

“Okay. You want to go first?”

“Hum...” Eleven thought for a bit, her eyes squeezing. Then, she got an idea and her face expression changed to something serious. “Honest round: would you rather go through everything we have been gone through to be together one more time, or just... not have been with Tina and Sean and remained sex buddies?”

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

Mike chuckled and leaned forwards, kissing Eleven’s nose. She smiled at him

“I’d rather go through everything again, so I could be with you.”

Eleven’s smile grew bigger.

“Too boring being just sex buddies?”

“Too... emotionless,” Mike replied. “I want to tell you how I feel every day.”

Eleven was about to lean in to kiss him when Dustin’s voice made itself heard, “God, you two are disgusting.”

They looked over at their friend who had a sleepy, yet upset kind of expression in his face.

“Stop being so cheesy,” he asked before tugging his blanket up and turning around. He accidentally bumped his arm against the girl’s. “Sorry. My friends are disgusting.”

December, 16th. Saturday. 12:33

Mike was nervous. It was stupid, really, to feel this way, but, God, he

didn't control his body's emotions, did he now? He could try, but his nervous-system was acting all crazy.

Eleven would be here any second now. His younger sister was reading a magazine in the living-room, sitting next to his father, who was taking a quick nap (hadn't he woken up two hours ago? How was it possible that he was sleepy already?). His mother and older sister were in the kitchen, making lunch. They knew Eleven was stopping by for lunch. But they thought she would be coming as Mike's friend, not as his girlfriend. So, of course he was nervous.

What if they didn't react well?

By 'they', Mike really meant his father. Things weren't going well. Two days ago, after Mike came back for the holiday, his father went up to his bedroom and sat down to have a nice 'friendly' chat with him. Spoiler alert: it went awful. Ted Wheeler tried to talk to his son about his future and what Mike was visioning for himself. Mike tried to avoid answering. The only thing he was sure nowadays was of Eleven. She was going to be in his life, no matter how long they lived.

The doorbell rang.

"I'll get it!" Mike shouted, climbing down the stairs fast and getting to the door right before his younger sister. "Go away, Holly."

"No," Holly replied, angry, and tried to open the door before him.

Mike pushed her away, trying his best not to hurt her, and opened the door, revealing his girlfriend in a pink dress and her hair done in a braid. He smiled.

"Hey," he whispered. She looked beautiful. "You loo-"

"El!" Holly shouted and ran to hug the girl.

Mike was pulled back, his eyes filled with betrayal. Eleven laughed at him before turning to Holly.

"Hey there, little Holly. How are you doing?"

"I have so much to tell you!" Holly exclaimed excitedly.

"Yeah, that's not going to happen," Mike intervened and pulled his girlfriend away from his littler sister while closing the door behind them. "El's mine tonight, Holly. Go find a doll to play with."

Holly made a face.

"You're an ass, Michael."

Mike gasped, watching his little sister flee to the living-room.

Eleven gazed at him with sparkling happy eyes and a smile on her face. He almost leaned down to kiss her, but stopped himself before it was too late. His family didn't know. Yet.

When Karen and Nancy Wheeler saw Eleven, they greeted her with hugs and exciting voices. Of course, Mike didn't take her to say hello to his father; he couldn't care less about the man (even though, you know, the fact he had to announce his relationship with Eleven in front of him was slowly killing him inside).

"You're nervous," Eleven stated once they found five minutes alone in his bedroom. Mike had kissed her too hungrily, his hands shaking a bit too much. "We don't have to tell them, Mike..."

"I want to tell them, El," Mike replied, grabbing her hands. "But... my dad... I'm worried he'll ask you inappropriate questions."

Eleven smiled, understanding. But then she shook her head and raised one hand to fix one of Mike's strands of black hair.

"It's going to be okay. I've known your dad for a while now, Mike. I know how he is."

Mike sighed, still not very reassured, but smiled nonetheless so he could make Eleven happy.

"And you have to see the bright side," Eleven continued.

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“Which is?”

“Your mom and your sisters will freak out in a good way about us, so... your father probably won’t even have time to say anything.”

Mike chuckled.

“You’re right.”

When Karen Wheeler called them down for dinner, Mike and Eleven kissed one last time before climbing down the stairs and taking their usual seats next to each other on the left side of the table. Mike was next to his father and in front of his mother.

Dinner was quiet for a while and, to be completely honest, it was all Ted Wheeler’s fault. He barely spoke to his older daughter because of her relationship with two boys and every time he tried to come up with a friendly conversation topic to have with his only son, Mike refused to engage in the talk. Nothing had to be said about Ted and Karen’s marriage.

They were halfway through dinner when Mike touched Eleven’s knee. She looked at him, confused, before seeing him clearing his throat.

“I... I have something to announce,” Mike stated nervously.

Everyone stopped eating, each one of his family members burning him with their curious eyes. Mike looked at Eleven for reassurance and she smiled softly.

“Are you two dating?” Nancy asked, going straight to the point. “If the answer is no, then don’t bother to announce whatever you want to announce, little brother.”

“Ah...” Mike was speechless, staring at his sister while his face was slowly turning red.

Eleven grabbed his hand under the table, squeezing it. He snapped out of his trance and cleared his throat.

“Well-“

“Weren’t you two dating already?” Holly asked, confused.

“Ah, no?” Mike answered, confused.

Suddenly, Holly’s mouth broke into a grin.

“So, you are dating now.”

Mike’s mouth fell open as Eleven covered her mouth, hiding her giggle.

“Oh my!” Karen exclaimed. “You two are really dating?!”

Mike and Eleven blushed and nodded, confirming.

A kind of squeal came out of Karen Wheeler’s mouth as Nancy smirked, proud of her little brother, and Holly said, “God, you guys are going to be even cheesier now.”

But Ted Wheeler didn’t say a word. He stared at Eleven with an apathic expression, his eyes clearly evaluating her (Was she good for his son? Was she a nice girlfriend? Did they have a future?). Eleven felt his gaze piercing her skin, but, keeping herself strong, she turned herself to him and said, “How do you feel about this, Mr. Wheeler?”

Ted blinked.

Mike’s hand trembled and Eleven squeezed it again.

She had caught Mike’s father by surprise, and now everyone’s attention was turned to him.

“Ted, aren’t you happy for them?” Karen asked.

“Yeah, Dad,” Nancy added. “Isn’t this good news?”

Ted coughed, uncomfortable, and his eyes met his son’s. Mike was defying him in some way, Ted knew it, but, on the other hand, looking at Eleven, who had always been a nice girl, a presentable and polite person to talk to, he couldn’t find anything bad to say about her.

“Yes,” he finally agreed, “this is good news.”

January, 15th. Monday. 14:23

She saw him first.

Eleven walked in the coffee shop, looking forwards to meeting Mike after classes, when she came face to face with Sean, sitting on a table near the window, smiling at a blonde girl with a pink scarf around her neck. They seemed close, their hands almost touching over the wooden table, and the way they were whispering to each other could only mean one thing: they had lovers' secrets. Secrets that no one else could hear. She knew how those worked now. She and Mike spent a lot of their time whispering to each other. Sometimes it was just random comments, but still, they were comments that no one else deserved to hear.

Sean's eyes looked up and he saw her there, standing by the coffee shop's door. He didn't know how to react at first. Then, Eleven decided to approach them and smile at the two.

“Hello, Sean,” she greeted politely. “Long time no see. How have you been?” That was all she wanted to know: that Sean was okay, that he was happier now.

Sean blinked, surprised. The girl in front of him was looking at him with some expectations. Some introductions.

“I'm fine,” Sean answered. He motioned with his hand to the blonde girl. “This is Stacy. Stacy, this is Jane.”

Stacy stood up and greeted Eleven with a quick hug. Eleven was surprised. She was a hugger? How nice.

“Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” Eleven replied. “I'm-“

The coffee shop's door opened again, a small bell ringing with its movement. She looked behind her shoulder and saw Mike stepping

inside the place, taking out his black beanie (good Lord, he knew she loved it when he wore beanies) and fixing his hair. His eyes searched the place until they finally spotted her. He smiled, confused, seeing Sean and the unknown blonde girl next to Eleven.

“Hi,” he greeted after approaching them.

“Hello, Mike,” Sean said politely, his eyes noticing how Mike touched Eleven’s back and the couple smiled at each other. “You guys are still together?”

The blonde girl gave Sean a confused smile as Eleven replied, “Yes. And... you two?”

Sean and Stacy blushed together.

“Sort of,” Stacy answered. She glanced at Sean. “We’re seeing how it goes.”

“Yeah, we’re seeing,” Sean agreed, getting a happy expression from the girl he was with.

Eleven managed to offer a sincere smile.

“Well, I wish you guys good luck, then.”

“You too,” Sean said with a small nod.

February, 13th. Tuesday. 22:22

“Tomorrow is Valentine’s Day,” Mike said, looking at the bedroom’s ceiling.

Eleven snorted and moved her body, cuddling closer to him. She rubbed her cheek against his chest.

“Yeah, and?”

“Do you want to do something?” Mike asked, a bit scared.

Eleven raised her head to look at her boyfriend with her eyebrow

arched.

“Since when do we celebrate Valentine’s Day?”

For the last three years, Eleven and Mike got together and spent the day watching films and getting high. At some point – after Dustin left the flat, of course -, they would fool around, sometimes making their way to the bedroom, other times not bothering in finding some privacy. If Dustin walked in, let him walk in.

“Since always?” Mike sounded confused, the hand he had playing with Eleven’s hair stopped. “But, anyways, this year.... It’s different, right?”

Eleven laid her chin on his chest and smiled carefree at him.

“Yes, it is. But that doesn’t mean we need to do something different.”

Mike looked away for a second.

“But what if I want to?” He muttered.

Eleven blinked, surprised. She pulled herself up and sat straight. Mike’s hand fell from her hair to her low back.

“What do you want to do?” She asked.

Mike shrugged.

“Mike,” Eleven called. He looked at her again. “Tell me.”

Mike hesitated, his eyes flickering away from her face once more, before he sat up too and turned his body to face her. He grabbed her hands and intertwined their fingers together.

“I want-“ He shook their hands – “I want to show us off.”

Eleven stared at him without saying a word.

“For years, El, we were just... friends,” Mike continued, his thumbs stroking the back of her hands. “This is the first year that, when I tell people I’m spending Valentine’s Day with my best friend, it also

means my girlfriend. I want to show that. I want to show us.”

A small, endearing smile stretched across Eleven’s lips and she leaned forwards to kiss Mike once and then twice. He smiled against her mouth.

“Okay,” she agreed. “We can do something different.”

“Likeeee.... Cinema? Or a picnic?”

“A picnic?” Eleven sounded surprised and started pulling herself up to her knees.

“Yeah, doesn’t it sound cool?” Mike asked, watching as his girlfriend moved closer to him, dropping her arms around his shoulders and wrapping her legs around him. He kept smiling widely at her, his eyes catching every single detail of her face as she got closer.

“I like picnics,” Eleven confessed in a whisper, her lips hovering above his. “But only if they have candy.”

“Of course there’s going to be candy,” Mike promised.

“And something... else?” Eleven wondered, playful.

“What, you want to get high in the middle of a park full of kids?”

“Sounds like a wonderful Valentine’s Day for me,” Eleven replied, leaning in to kiss him softly.

“Sounds great, then,” Mike agreed before pulling her to another kiss.

March, 24th. Saturday. 23:22

They had started drinking at nine pm. Dustin had been the one to beg them to go out with him since he didn’t feel like being a loner at a classmate’s party. He even bought all drinks and found drinking games for them to play until it was time to leave the flat. Lucas, Max and Will had been invited to show up, but only Will came around after dinner, holding a bottle of cheap wine. His hair was a mess and

there was still some paint on his neck from the time he had spent working on a new painting.

“Thank God you are here,” Dustin confessed drunk. “Those two are so... disgusting.”

Will peeked behind Dustin’s shoulder and saw Eleven and Mike leaning in and whispering to each other. The boy smiled.

“They are in love, Dustin.”

“They are awful,” the other boy complained.

Meanwhile, Eleven and Mike were checking their latest adds to their ‘let’s give Dustin a heart attack someday’ album, clearing unaware that their two friends were staring at them, Dustin with annoyance and Will with amusement.

Eleven giggled in mischief as Mike showed her yet another photo of last weekend, when Dustin had had a date with a girl from his course.

“What are you two looking at?”

Mike and Eleven jumped together, surprised. Upon seeing Will standing in front of them, their mouths broke into huge smiles and they stood up to greet the boy. They were clearly way too drunk.

Will joined the drinking game, which was something about each one of them having a colour and every time the app gave an order with their colour, they would have to do it. Mike and Eleven were already just doing it because Dustin ordered them to do so.

“I’m not going to call my mom drunk!” Will exclaimed at some point.

“You’re not even that drunk!” Dustin complained and filled Will’s glass one more time. “Come on, call her and you can win more points. Don’t you want to win?!”

“Uh, no?”

Dustin threw his hands up, frustrated.

“I’m so done with all of you. Let’s go out.”

They called for an Uber, none of them feeling sober enough to drive (and Dustin was too tired of being the one driving them and risking his license).

The party was already wild when they got there. Funnily enough, Dustin found company right away, once he stepped inside the living-room and saw this curly-haired girl from his course standing next to the stereo. He approached her, nervous, and said a quick hello. The girl’s face lightened up upon seeing him and threw her arms around him.

“So, is this the reason why Dustin wanted to come to the party?” Will asked, amused.

But no one replied to him.

When looking behind himself, Will found Eleven and Mike whispering something to each other, their lips almost touching.

Will sighed.

“I need a drink,” he said to no one and went into the kitchen.

“Dance for one hour,” Mike suggested, raising one finger up.

Eleven pouted.

“But babe...”

“And then, upstairs,” Mike continued. Eleven’s eyes perked up, interested in what he was saying. “Or... home?”

Eleven wrapped her arms around Mike’s waist, pulling their bodies closer, and lifted herself up on her tiptoes so she could get to his mouth.

“I like how you think, Wheeler,” she whispered against his lisp before biting his bottom lip.

Suddenly, someone crashed against them.

They turned around, upset, and Eleven was ready to complain when all the words she had right on the tip of her tongue got stuck. Tina was standing in front of them, her arms raised in surrender. Behind her, there were two girls giggling.

“I’m so sorry,” she dragged the last word. She turned around and walked away from them.

Mike was frowning when Eleven looked up at him.

“She didn’t recognize us, did she?” Eleven asked.

“Or she pretended not to,” Mike added.

Right after they began their relationship, something that had fallen between what their friendship had been and how often they expressed their feelings for one another with no trouble, Eleven asked Mike about his break up with Tina. It hadn’t ended well, according to him. Maybe Mike hadn’t chosen the right night, or maybe it had been the way he said it (but he had been completely honest with her), but Tina didn’t react well. He would never blame her for it. After all, Mike did end everything because he was in love with someone else. Mike told Eleven how Tina had freaked out, how she had shouted at him and cried before running out of the apartment. Mike hadn’t gone after her. Why would he? What good would he do?

“But it’s fine,” Mike suddenly said. He leaned his head down, laying his chin on Eleven’s head. “She is happier like this.”

“Are you sure?” Eleven asked, worried. Her drunk daze was suddenly lost.

Mike shrugged.

“I don’t know, El. I’m just hoping.”

They found their ways into the jungle that was the living-room. They saw Dustin dancing with a girl and shared a confused look (what had they missed?), and Will was somewhere making small chat with guys from the Arts course.

Eleven and Mike danced around for a bit, but, sooner, then found

each other's mouths more appealing than the songs playing. Slowly, they made their way out of the messy dancefloor and close to a wall, where Mike's tall body managed to hide Eleven behind him.

They hadn't changed much; the Mike and Eleven that used to be sex buddies did all sort of things that couple Mike and Eleven did. The only difference was the words, the easiness that came to be with each other officially how 'love' and 'adore' were often said to one another.

"I really like your nose," Mike whispered the confession, surprising Eleven.

She smiled at him before tilting her head back and kissing his nose.

"You're a dork. And, for that, I'm going to go pee."

"Want company?" Mike offered.

"Miikee!"

Dustin pushed Mike away from El, his eyes frenetic.

"Dude, I need your help!"

"Are you okay?" Mike asked, concerned, one of his hands stretched in Eleven's direction.

"Yes, yes. I-I just need you for five minutes, okay?" He looked at Eleven. "Okay?"

"Sure," she replied, and then watched her boyfriend being dragged away by a talkative, drunk Dustin.

Eleven made her way to the bathroom, sure to find it on the first floor (all bathrooms were on the first floor), but there was no line in front of any door, and she got confused.

She started opening random doors, trying to guess which one was the bathroom, until she opened one last one, found the room she wanted, but got face to face with Tina. The girl was sitting on the edge of the bathtub, writing something down on her cell phone, when she heard the door open and looked up.

“Oh,” El let out. “I’m sorry. I... I need to use the bathroom.”

Tina frowned, her eyes cold-piercing Eleven’s skin. She stood up and made her way out of the bathroom, bumping on purpose against Eleven.

“Hey.”

Tina turned around.

Eleven gulped, licking her lips – why did she call out for the other girl? – before getting the guts to say it, “I’m sorry, okay?”

Tina frowned, surprised.

“What?”

“I’m sorry,” Eleven repeated. “I’m sorry Mike broke your heart. Really. I- I-...” She didn’t know what else to say.

And honestly there wasn’t much to be said.

“Yeah, whatever,” Tina replied and turned her back to Eleven, making her way down the corridor.

Eleven blinked, without knowing what to do.

It was only fair, she guessed.

After climbing down the stairs, Eleven stood still on the last step, searching for her boyfriend in the wild crowd of drunk teenagers.

But she couldn’t find him and, meanwhile, it was Will who showed up in front of her.

“I think Mike is helping Dustin hooking up with a girl.”

Eleven laughed.

“How?”

“By distracting her friend?” Will questioned, even to himself, since he wasn’t sure that he had seen the right person. “I think.”

Eleven rolled her eyes.

“I know that move. Where are they?”

“Outside.”

Mike was making small chit chat with a girl, being polite and keeping his distance, while, a few meters away from them, was Dustin and a curly-haired girl making out.

Eleven and Will approached them and, as soon as he saw his girlfriend, Mike's eyes brightened up and he happily introduced her to the girl he was talking to.

“This is Mandy. She's... uh, she's... Carla's?” The girl nodded. “Yes, Carla's friend. This is my girlfriend, El, and this is Will.”

“Just Will,” the boy joked.

As Mandy started telling Will about her brother, who was also named Will, Eleven took the opportunity to wrap her arms around Mike and leaned up to whisper in his ear, “What's going on?”

Mike turned his head to her and kissed her forehead before saying in a murmuring voice, “Carla is the only person Mandy knows here, so I have to keep her company while Dustin there –“He motioned with his head to their friend, who was still making out with the girl –“gets to have a bit of fun.”

“And who is Carla?” Eleven asked, curious.

Mike shrugged.

“Someone from Dustin's course? I don't know. I didn't catch it.”

Taking advantage of Will keeping Mandy busy, Mike leaned down to kiss his girlfriend, their lips brushing softly against one another. Eleven smiled against her boyfriend's mouth. He tasted like beer, but she didn't mind.

The kiss started to get intense, like it always did when they were drunk and horny, but Mike pulled back before he went too far and

whispered against his girlfriend's mouth, "I love you..."

Eleven offered him an adorable smile.

"I think we should go home," she said.

"Yeah?"

Eleven leaned in for a quick kiss.

"Yeah."

June, 20th. Wednesday. 15:01

It was a hot-burning day in Hawkins. Eleven and Mike had left their houses early and gone to the river to enjoy the day outdoors. They had brought lunch and all sort of snacks to eat during the day, one gigantic beach towel in where they both fitted, and a deck of cards to play if they got bored.

"Maybe you should put sunscreen again," Mike suggested.

Eleven, who was lying on her stomach, raised to her elbows and sent Mike an intrigued look.

"You just want to put sunscreen on me again, don't you?"

Mike chuckled.

"I'm just looking out for you, babe."

Eleven rolled her eyes and laid down again, using her arms as a pillow.

The sun had been a warm pool of light against her skin until, suddenly, something covered it, shadowing her. When something soft and wet touched Eleven's shoulder, she sighed, recognizing Mike's lips.

"You're an idiot."

“An idiot you love.”

“Sadly.”

Mike playfully bit her shoulder.

Eleven giggled and turned around, laying on her back. Mike took the opportunity to cuddle her, dropping a leg over hers, and wrapping an arm around her waist while the other one went under her neck to be used as a pillow.

“You’re a very dependent person, aren’t you?” Eleven teased him, stretching one of her arms up so she could play with his hair.

Mike pouted, pretending to be sad for a second, before attacking her with his lips, kissing all her face. Eleven laughed, closing her eyes and secretly – or not – enjoying Mike’s pecks all over her skin.

“God, you guys are disgusting.”

Mike raised his head up and found Dustin approaching them with a towel over his shoulder and his sunglasses on.

“Hey Dustin,” Eleven greeted with a happy smile.

“I’m rethinking my decision of joining you guys,” Dustin confessed, stopping right above their towels. Eleven tilted her head up, seeing him upside down. “Are you guys going to make out all afternoon?”

“Maybe,” Mike and Eleven said at the same time.

Dustin made a face. Nonetheless, he dropped his beach towel next to them and took his shirt off.

“What is that?” Eleven asked, pointing at the necklace hanging around Dustin’s neck.

Dustin’s face turned a bit red as he sat down on his towel.

“It was a gift. From Carla.”

Mike and Eleven let out a long, teasing ‘uuuh’ at the same time,

making Dustin blush even harder.

“Shut up. It’s a sun. It represents something nice or whatever.” Dustin looked away from his two friends, clearly embarrassed.

There was a quiet moment between the three friends.

“Hey Dustin?” Mike called.

Dustin glanced at them.

“Yeah?”

“We’re happy for you,” Eleven stated with a warm smile over her lips.

“Really happy,” Mike added.

The corner of Dustin’s lips jerked into a shy smile.

“Thanks, guys.” He paused. “And... I’m happy for you too, okay? Even though I always say you guys are disgusting.”

Mike and Eleven chuckled.

“Oh, we know,” Mike said and leaned down to leave a huge kiss on his girlfriend’s cheek.

They hung out for a while the three, talking and laughing. Dustin asked about Max and Lucas at some point, and Eleven confirmed that the two are still very much happy, even though they had been barely sleeping with the twins waking them up in the middle of the almost every night.

“At least, they got their parents’ support,” Eleven concluded. “It helps them a lot.”

Dustin’s phone suddenly began ringing. He took it out of his short’s pocket, read the ID caller and stood up. He stepped away, looking for some privacy.

“Carla,” Mike said.

“Totally Carla,” Eleven agreed.

They looked at each other with softness in their eyes and a smile on their lips.

Finding each other all by themselves once again, they leaned in, their lips meeting halfway before Mike pulled Eleven down against the beach towel.

Their kiss grew passionate, hungry; their hands stroking each other’s skin, Mike’s fingers digging in Eleven’s thigh for a second while she gripped the back of his neck, keeping him close.

But, before they lost control – and that had happened so many times since they started dating -, Mike pulled back. He leaned his forehead against hers, their eyes meeting again.

“You know what?” Mike said.

Eleven smiled.

“What?”

“Above all – English partners, classmates, sex buddies, boyfriend and girlfriend -, we’re best friends,” Mike reminded her. “And I’m happy, really happy.”

Eleven stroked his cheekbone with gentleness, nodding.

“I’m really happy too.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you for sticking with this story until the last chapter. I hope you've liked reading it as much I liked writing it.

I promise I'll be back with more Stranger Things fics.

Kudps & Comments always make my day.

Love, Dee.